

You never arrive at a place where you can put your feet up or put your foot down. A study of conscious and unconscious processes in assessments of black and ethnic minority families.

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Distinguishing details and personnel described in this dissertation have been disguised to protect the identity of the research participants and the organisation within which this research took place.

Abstract

This psychosocial study examines some processes at work when commissioners outsource to independent social worker experts (from a black and ethnic minority background social work), assessments involving black and ethnic minority children and families in cases where there are serious child protection issues.

Eight participants, (three commissioners, four independent social workers and one parent). were interviewed using the Free Associative Narrative Interview method (FANI). The psychosocial research method used values the subjectivity of the researcher, and the FANI method is consistent with this. (Holloway and Jefferson 2000). Data was analysed using a blend of thematic and narrative approaches, supported by reflections on the researcher's own emotional experience of the interviews.

The findings of this study centre on assessments of parents from black and ethnic minority backgrounds who had experienced structural inequalities, discrimination and in some cases racism. The independent social work experts have used a particular framework to undertake the assessments and this has assisted them in formulating recommendations. Anxiety and conflict have featured heavily in the assessments. These anxieties are interwoven with the impact of racism on families, independent social work experts **and commissioners working in modern social work organisations. Alongside this the** importance of anti-racist social work is considered. Anti-racist social work recognises that racism exists within social work and offers a framework to tackle racism within social work. However, currently anti-racist social work appears to have slipped off the professional agenda and has been replaced by more 'neutral' discourses such as 'diversity'. This allows one not to think about race and racism. It is a study of how anxieties are delegated to independent social work experts. My

interest in this study stems from being a black, female, ethnic minority researcher and independent social work expert.

The key research findings are firstly, there are conscious and unconscious processes that have influenced the independent social work expert's approach, which included being motivated and affected by their personal experiences with their own parents and families of origin.

Secondly, the way an assessment was presented by the independent social work expert was influenced by unresolved issues from their background.

Thirdly, the independent social work expert's biographical material is significant both in shaping their capacity to do the work sensitively and in depth, but also in creating blind spots for them.

There are significant implications for social work practice. There is a need for a different model and approach to supervision in social work, which is informed by a recognition of the impact of conscious and especially unconscious influences of a practitioner's biographical material. The importance of intersectionality is considered. This is thinking about how family/emotional/biographical factors are interacting with the dynamics of race/ethnicity, and how anxieties about all these in commissioners and practitioners produce a complex psycho-social knot that has to be understood and worked with if we are to do justice to these cases.

This deep and complex biographical investment in this work is both a source of strength and vulnerability. It is evident that there is something professionally and personally reparative for the independent social work experts, and myself as the researcher, in engaging in the discussions and reflections that make up the data and the findings of this research.

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1. Chapter 1

My biography, personal journey and setting a context for the research.

1.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into four parts. In the first part, I will set out the rationale for the study. In the second part, I will explore my personal journey that has led me to undertake this study. Thirdly, I will be looking at developing and occupying the 'third position' and the importance of this concept. Finally, I will be outlining the chapters of this study and the areas to be covered.

1.2. Driving force.

The driving force behind this research comes from my personal and professional interest as someone who is regularly asked to undertake independent social work assessments in cases where race and culture have become an issue. So much so that it warrants a second opinion from a professional with some cultural understanding. However, it is often difficult to be certain **about** what exactly this means. **The** contested, or uncertain nature of many of the key operational concepts involved in this work is a central aspect of concern. I have been involved in some very complex assessments involving children and families from the Indian sub-continent (now known as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh), Iran, Afghanistan, Middle East, Africa and Eastern Europe. All the cases involved child protection issues and were in court proceedings involving either the public and/or the private law.

1.3 Understanding myself, consultation and therapy.

It is vital in a study such as this for me to think about my biography and journey towards undertaking the research. Firstly, I am the researcher, and secondly I am also an independent social work expert, and I undertake similar assessments to the independent social work experts that I have interviewed. As I have stated in the introduction, I am

regularly asked to conduct independent social work assessments in cases where race and culture is a prominent issue. It is therefore imperative that I can separate out my own role as an independent social work expert from that of researcher into cases involving such experts. Understanding myself and how my professional, cultural and personal material may impact on the research I am undertaking is a crucial aspect of researcher reflexivity and awareness. In understanding myself, I need to be aware of my vulnerabilities and blind spots. I am in some ways used to talking and exploring myself as I trained as a counsellor in 1994 at the Roehampton Institute. As a part of this training, I was required to go into therapy and had the privilege to be in therapy with a Muslim woman who originated from Kenya. She sadly died about 20 years ago after the therapy had ended. Some years later, I embarked on therapy again after moving to work in a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team where I found the work challenging and welcomed a space to talk about my feelings. My therapist has written about the challenges of working with black and ethnic minority patients. He also introduced and developed the notion of the 'Thinking Space' to engage with complex dynamics and feelings about race, racism and working with black and ethnic minority patients. He has raised awareness of the political dimensions of psychotherapy and social work. He also looks at institutions and the part played by organisations. In my work with my therapist, I thought about the wider picture in my professional practice. I found this challenging at times, but I valued therapy and believed that it was an important investment in my self-development and insight into myself.

I have also sought and received professional consultation from a Consultant who understood Islam (as he is a Muslim and has provided therapy and consultation to other Muslims as well as other minority groups) and the challenges of being a practitioner from a black/ethnic background working cross culturally. I had a number of lively discussions

with him. These relationships did challenge me and encouraged me to look below the surface of my professional life.

Both my therapist and Consultant helped me to learn more about myself and in particular experiences of racism. This helped me understand the impact of racism on myself and also some of the parents and children I have assessed. I also thought about institutional racism and how for example black professionals are sometimes played off against each other. It provided me with some understanding of the experiences and stories presented to me by the independent social work experts who have spoken about racism in this study, particularly Chris, Eve and Andy.

1.4 Interview by a fellow researcher.

To assist me in the process of developing maximum reflexive awareness in this research study, I was interviewed by a fellow researcher, as a kind of auto-ethnographic exercise. Hunt (1989) has highlighted the importance of subjectivity and self-understanding in fieldwork. I need to understand myself, my blind spots as transference and countertransference will have a role to play in how the data is collected.

Interestingly the fellow researcher is a woman who originates from India. Although we are very different people, it helped me to engage with someone who may also have some understanding of my background and struggles even though the interviewer never revealed anything of herself to me. Hunt (1989, p.27) asks one to think about how unconscious communication can affect empathy and rapport.

I felt the fellow researcher offered me empathy and rapport and I was able to open up to her. I also felt as a researcher I offered the same to the participants of the research. A transcript of the interview is attached in Appendix 1.

From my training as a counsellor, I am also aware of how to enable people to open up and talk. They have to feel that they are being listened to and they have a space to articulate their experiences. My own interview allowed me a space to talk about my work and myself as a person and why I had chosen to do what I did. In addition to this, I have had the privilege of being supervised by two very experienced supervisors who are also psychotherapists. They are both committed to anti-racist practice and thinking about racism. We have had many lively and at times painful discussions **during the course** my research. They have helped me to step back and adopt a third position and think about my blind spots.

1.5 My journey into social work

My journey into social work started, while I was growing up as a child and observing the challenges faced by my parents. There was no doubt that my family experienced poverty, racism and gender discrimination. However, my parents and relatives were resilient and robust. It was the bravery of my parents that made me think about working with other ethnic minorities and using the knowledge and strength that I had gained from my parents. Initially, my interest was in community social work, the empowerment of communities and mobilisation of community resources. My first degree was in law, and this made me aware of the rights of women and children. I enjoyed the sociology of law, family law and housing law. I wanted to get my hands dirty and get involved with real human problems and difficulties, so I spent a couple of vacations working in law centres and became interested in community work and engaging the community.

However, I was clear that I did not want to train as a solicitor or a barrister, but to combine law and social work. My first taste of social work was when I set up an Asian

Women's Refuge, Kiran Women's Aid which is now the Kiran Project in East London. The work was difficult and challenging at times. It was my first real taste of working with the

‘Asian community’ and I learned about the discrimination and abuse of women and the complexities of domestic violence as well as the differences and unifying forces in the ‘Asian community’.

1.6 Training in social work.

From there I decided to train in social work. My interest in studying social work at Nottingham University was based firstly on Professor Olive Stevenson being the Head of Department and the concept of the student unit as a basis for teaching and training. This model aimed at encouraging an integration of theory and practice. This was a wonderful experience as there was a group of 8 students attached to an area children's team in Radford in Nottingham. One interesting project worked with some families in an intensive way to try to keep children from going into care. Another interesting feature of the experience was that black and white members of the social work team chose to sit in different rooms. However, the ethnically mixed student group sat in one room together and we ended up acting as the mediators and containers for the dynamics in this office. The tensions between the two groups were very real and alive. There were lively debates about racism and anti-racist practice. It made me aware of many issues around race, culture and religion. It also made me aware, unlike the legal profession, within social work one could talk about racism and anti-racist practice and there appeared to be space to discuss the complexities. I knew from my training that I wanted to be a social worker as opposed to a lawyer.

So early in my training, I developed an active commitment to anti-racist social work. This appeared to be supported by the literature that was very alive at the time in its commitment to anti-racist social work practice. This has remained a part of who I am as a practitioner. Radford was a poor deprived area with a predominately black and ethnic minority community. As my career developed, I eventually found a role that combined my social work and legal training. This was the role of the Guardian ad Litem and later the role of the Children's Guardian. I also started to undertake assessments in Pakistan, and this helped me to understand my unique background.

Before I took up the role of Guardian ad Litem, I trained as a counsellor and practice assessor (now practice educator), and I tutored in social work as I wanted to pass on my skills and knowledge. Over time, I moved into independent social work, and I am now considered an expert in undertaking assessments of children and families from ethnic minority and black communities. I have developed my work internationally in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and the Middle East particularly Iran. I know from feedback I have received from families that I have been able to engage constructively with some of them and they have been able to open up to me. Local Authorities also seem to value my expertise as I am regularly instructed to undertake assessments and I am developing a Non-Governmental Organisation in Pakistan. The nature of the work will be to assess, support, provide guidance and therapeutic work for extended family members that have been assessed for court proceedings in the UK and there is an involvement with the child protection system in the UK. The service will offer support, welfare checks and social work to children that have been placed in Pakistan from the UK. It will also offer educational and training to practitioners in Pakistan. The project will also offer education and support to young people and women who have been made homeless, as a result of abuse. I have undertaken this work for the last 10 years and the aim is to formalise this work.

1.7 Struggles as an independent social work expert.

There have been many struggles in the course of my work as an independent social work expert, and I have been tested and challenged. However, my unique background has made me feel less anxious about certain situations, but I am very aware of the anxiety created in some professionals by placements in countries such as Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Iran. I recall an assessment in Qadian in India where I was sent twice. The Grandfather was finally seen as a safe person for the child in question, but it took around five years in total for an agreement to be reached for the child to go and join his extended family in India. However, by then his Grandfather had died. Although there were many other family members the child was very close to his Grandfather. **Unfortunately**, he had been unable to see him before his death. It was very tragic and poignant case. I had the privilege of getting to know the Grandfather who had been described as a

"brave man" by the Judge. I remember his humanity and humility and his love for his Grandchild to this day. I recall another case where it took three years to place a Grandchild with his Grandmother in Peshawar in Pakistan. This was due to the bombings in Peshawar, which caused much anxiety to the Local Authority and Children's Guardian. Khan (2017) has described the discrimination against Christians in Pakistan and his article provides some basis for the anxieties of the Local Authority that instructed me in this particular assessment. But my assessment suggested that individual families cannot be blamed or judged for the politics in a particular area. The Local Authority ended up cancelling the Grandmother's visa application at one point, but when she was finally successful in obtaining her visa and arrived in the UK there was a complete turnaround in perceptions about this woman. Also a real admiration for her cool calm manner and her dignity. She left England with her Grandson.

She remains in touch with me and I receive updates as to how her Grandson is progressing. He is thriving in her care.

1.8 Radicalisation cases.

More recently I have been involved in several radicalisation cases, two of which have been reported in the media. I have been struck by the different approaches used by the Judiciary in these cases. As in all cases involving issues of inequality, gender, race, culture, religion and issues of racism using a humane approach is important. The ability to stand back, reflect and be aware of one's blind spots I feel is pivotal in undertaking this work. I will refer to this as developing the third position. This is not always easy, as sometimes one needs to process and think a great deal before the third position of stepping back and reflecting can be achieved.

As a researcher, I have tried to stand back and reflect at all points in the process. I think my approach has allowed the participants to open up, reveal and talk about themselves and also think about themselves.

1.9. Developing the third position.

I have referred to the idea of holding a third position in the assessments that I undertake and I need to explain what this means. The notion of the third position is discussed by Klein (1946), Winnicott (1971), Bion (1962,1967), Britton (1989) and Benjamin (1998). **They** have in their different ways explained how infants, children and adults acquire the capacity for psychological separateness and what this involves. Others such as Lowe (2014), Krause (2014) have also referred to the third position in their writing. Britton (1989.p 87) explains the third position allows objects relationships to be observed. It also allows one to retain one's own view and allowing oneself to reflect.

1.10 Thinking Space, developing the third position at the Tavistock Clinic.

Lowe (2014) advocated the third position in the Thinking Space at the Tavistock Clinic. In his book, (2014, p2-5) he refers to the Thinking space as:

“a mental space and a regular space to discuss and think about the challenges of diversity.”

Krause (2014, p 111-112) develops the third position explaining if a child needs to develop a relationship with the other and the third party. This will involve “a process of destruction” and a process of symbolization.

There are also internal and external links involved in the third position. There are a number of complicated factors (developmental, unconscious, historical, political, social and structural) which place primary importance on the body, the individual and on the present experience. These can inhibit and obscure the ability to make links in how relationships, history, social context, developmental trajectory and potentially how personhood and relationships unfold. She refers to Winnicott (1971, p.103) arguing (p115):

“cultural, collective experiences and expectations are found inside and outside” and this led Winnicott to locate culture in the place that:

“is at the continuity-contiguity moment, where transitional phenomena originate” Krause further develops this by applying it to adult life, considering culture and applying it to cross-cultural work. She refers to the work of Bourdieu (1977), particularly the concept of “habitus”. This is the mediating link between the subjective world, cultural and the social world in which the individual is born and which s/he shares with others.

She develops the idea that one is not always aware of one’s early experiences. In the words of Bourdieu (1986, p. 466), these early experiences may be “beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will.” She also mentions “doxa”, which is “a primary experience of the social world, a kind of knowledge without concepts (pp 470-471).” She

adds (p115), doxa is “generated by structures of relationships as well as by the mental structures” which constitute a “kind of normative unconscious”.

Krause highlights the importance of Winnicott and Bourdieu who have helped us to understand the third position, allowing us to be able to reflect and think.

1.11 Application of the third position to this study

Moving now to think about how the third position is central to the psychoanalytically informed nature of my practice, and this research. I have wondered about and tried to access the conscious and unconscious processes involved for the commissioners of assessments, the independent social work experts and the parents in these cases. One reason why it is imperative in my opinion to be able to hold the third position when undertaking these complex social work assessments is that I consider myself to be a British Pakistani. My parents were born in Pakistan, and I was born in Birmingham. I am part of a minority ethnic group. I will be defining this term in chapter 2. Like many other members of minority ethnic groups, I have experienced racism and prejudice, and I believe being treated as a minority will have a bearing on my practice. This is something I have to think about, particularly the pain that can arise as a result of this experience.

Questions of cultural difference become mingled with experiences of prejudice and blame. **It is**, therefore, crucial that I can adopt a third position, **so that** I can also hold a reasoned and objective view of the families I am assessing. **I have to balance** the needs of children, the professional forces at work in the commissioning of assessments, and the responsibilities I have in relation to the courts. This practice stance is reflected in my approach to the research in which a particular form of cultural and political reflexivity is central.

1.12 The practice based hypotheses of the research

As I have described, I am often asked to undertake assessments for cases in court proceedings where there have been complexities around understanding the families where there have been issues around race and culture, religion and language. I am often commissioned jointly by the parties involved in the proceedings (parents, children's Guardian and the Local Authority) or sometimes by one of the parties. I am often asked to assist the parties to unravel some of the complex issues, so that the parties can reach an agreement and reach a safe resolution for the child in the centre of the proceedings. During some of my work, I have observed some potential injustices being caused to parents and children. This has led to my interest in examining the relationship between the commissioner, independent social work expert and the parent. I am interested in the interrelationship between the three groups (commissioner, expert social worker and parent), as well as in each other's thinking.

1.13 My hypothesis

My hypothesis from my own work as an independent social work expert and as the researcher of this study is that there are a number of factors at play that often generate an anxiety laden knot of case circumstances. The commissioners of the service may have some anxiety about being called racist. There may be actual confusions over the meaning of culture. Thus, there may be an element of trying to outsource anxieties and uncertainties to the expert. There will be the biographical motives of the expert and the parent's uncertainties about handling 'culture' as it appears in the thinking and behaviour of professionals. It appears a very complex area and it appears that racism plays in some cases a subtle and other cases not so subtle part in some of the decisions or reluctance to accept decisions/recommendations. There also seems to me to be anxiety which is outsourced or projected onto the expert to solve. The whole notion of the role of anxiety will also need to be examined as each player has their set of anxieties which are "acted out" in some capacity.

1.14 Aims of the research and main research question.

The research aims to investigate the phenomenon from three interlocking points of view; those of the commissioners, the independent social work experts and the parents. I would like to disentangle at least some strands of the complex 'knot' that these cases seem to represent.

This has led me to formulate the main research question driving this inquiry.

“What is going on unconsciously and consciously for the independent social work expert, commissioner and parent in the assessments involving race and culture which the participants have selected to describe?”

1.15 Free Association Narrative Interview Method(FANI).

I have engaged with what are my transference and countertransference responses to this as part of my process of inquiry and data analysis. I have used the Free Association Narrative and Interview Method as devised by Holloway and Jefferson (2013, p42) to help me unravel this.

The reason for choosing this method is that it recognises the importance of unconscious dynamics in the research interview. The approach also notices and makes analytical use of defences against anxiety. This is very important for my research. As the area of race and racism can be very anxiety provoking. This method takes account of the anxiety of the interviewer as this seen as part of the research. It recognises the importance of unconscious material which is not visible on the surface and may be deeply buried. It recognises that:

“both the researched and researcher are anxious, defended subjects”. (p42)

Hence the feelings in and around the interview are of value for understanding dynamics of the research relationship. Thus, I need to be aware of my feelings as they arise in the interviews. Alongside this approach I have used thematic analysis to interpret the data collected, and aimed to bring the two approaches into connection.

1.16 Approaching the data

With the main research question in mind, I developed the following additional questions which I applied to the data once it had been gathered.

Question 1

How has the background, racial origin and belonging to an ethnic minority group affected the assessment?

Question 2

How have structural inequalities/ discrimination, marginalisation and alienation impacted on the work?

Question 3

How has thinking about culture, and the meaning attributed to it affected the work and what does it mean to the client that they worked with?

Question 4

What has been the framework of practice that is used?

Question 5

How has placement within families and placing outside the family (such as adoption) been managed within the assessments?

Question 6

How has conflict been managed in the case?

Question 7

How have boundaries been maintained?

Question 8 (biography, reflection and maintain the third position)

Has the choice of the case or assessment consciously or unconsciously mirrored a relationship with one or another parent for the practitioner?

Question 9

How has the third position - stepping back - reflecting been maintained?

Question 10

How have certain tools been used to assist practice, for example supervision, reflection, personal therapy?

Question 11

What was felt, experienced, observed in the interview space?

Question 12

How did the researcher feel about each independent social work expert, commissioner, and parent and what was the countertransference?

Question 13

What feeling or emotional state did the independent social work expert, commissioner and parent appear to be in and to communicate?

Question 14

What understanding did independent social work expert/parent / commissioner seem to have of their feeling, emotions and those of others?

Question 15

What relationship or attachment did independent social work expert/commissioner/parent create with the researcher. Also how did the researcher make sense of the relationship and use the relationship to understand the expert social worker/commissioner?

1.17 The categories

These questions are divided into four categories:

Category one (questions 1 to 3) relates to the types of cases/assessments presented by the independent social work experts/commissioners. The cases/assessments appear to have particular features. All the families/parents/children are from a particular ethnic minority background, racial origin and cultural background. Consideration is given to factors such as structural inequalities, discrimination, alienation and how they have had an impact on the assessment process.

Category two (questions 4 and 6) relate to the framework of practice used by the expert social work practitioners/commissioners and how this has helped them to make a recommendation as to whether the child(ren) returned to the parents or were placed away from the parent.

Category three (question 6 to 8) relates to the notion of conflict, which is a feature of the material presented as all the assessments are in the context of court proceedings. Conflict is a natural process. The conflict may be as a result of the triangular relationships of the independent social work expert, parent and commissioner. There are also conflicts between the professionals and anxiety from the commissioner projected **into** the independent social work expert. Within this, there is a consideration of what may be going on consciously and unconsciously for the three participants. There is then the inter-relationship between myself and my research subjects. This leads to a consideration of thinking about all this to generate a more in-depth analysis of the data.

Category four (Questions 9 to 15) is the ability for the independent social work experts to step back and think about the tools required for reflection and supervision.

I will now outline what will be covered in the remaining chapters of this study.

In chapter 2, I have defined key terms referred to in this study. I have also revisited the research questions. I then move onto discuss the case studies of Andy, Chris, Eve and Ivy.

In chapter 3, I will be exploring the relevant literature for this study. This will include examining the evolution of social work, the role that National Association of Guardian Ad Litem plays and **the impact of** studies **examining** racism including anti-racist social work. I **will also** explore radical social work and anti-oppressive, anti-discriminatory practice. The literature in respect of assessments, framework of practice, conflict and what is going on unconsciously and consciously for independent social work experts is explored. The final section thinks about the ability of independent social work experts to step back and the tools required for reflection and supervision.

In chapter 4 I will explore methodology and data collection. I consider ontological, epistemological and ethical issues. I move onto to consider the practical matters such as why I have chosen a qualitative method. I examine the differences between qualitative and quantitative methods, focusing on the psycho-social research method FANI. In examining how the data was collected I explore how the supplementary research questions were developed. I will examine data analysis and the difference between thematic and other qualitative methods. From this, I will examine how I developed the supplementary questions and categories. I have examined the case study method, anti-oppressive research, transference and countertransference. I end with a practical example of examining the case of Chris.

In Chapter 5, I consider case analysis. I will be exploring the stages in the case analysis and the development of the four cases. I will also examine the themes and how to code the

themes. I will be examining narrative analysis and the themes that have emerged from the narrative analysis. I will explore the nature of the conflict that has been presented and countertransference responses and the themes that have emerged. The chapter is concluded with a summary.

In Chapter 6, I will be examining the biographical connection. I will be focusing on the biographies of Andy, Chris and Eve. I will explore motivation, how biographies sensitise independent social work experts to behave in a certain way. The relationship between the independent social work experts, their mothers and fathers, strengths and vulnerabilities. The chapter will end with a summary.

In chapter 7, I discuss the findings of the research. I will explore the impact on commissioners of assessing black and ethnic minority families with a number of complex factors and the organisational factors that impact on the commissioners causing anxiety. I examine how commissioners outsource the anxiety to independent social work experts. I explore the impact of the independent social work expert's biographies. I **also** examine how the anxiety for both the commissioners and independent social work experts can be contained and managed. I will discuss the original and key finding which is thinking about the **impact of the biographical material on the approaches to work and the influence of conscious and unconscious processes in the assessments of families**. I link the literature that will assist in the process of reflection and space to think. **I will be considering the significance of the independent social work experts' biographical material in shaping their capacities to do the work and the implications for models and approaches to the supervision of social work practitioners. I will consider the importance of 'intersectionality' in how family/emotional/biographical factors are interacting with the**

dynamics of race/ethnicity, and how this creates anxieties particularly for the independent social work experts and the commissioners.

In chapter 8, I explore the conclusions and the way forward. I consider the impact of the study on myself and how I have moved forward. **Also the implications for practice.**

2. Chapter 2 The case studies and definitions.

2.1 Introduction.

In this chapter, I am examining the four case studies. Before I do this I will be defining some key terms and revisiting the key questions.

2.2 Defining Key terms.

It is important to think about some key terms such as race, black, ethnicity, Islamophobia, and racism. I would say that a discussion about these terms can be highly emotive and there are disagreements about definitions. **The assessments** presented by the independent social work experts in my study **revealed** a great deal of emotion and anxiety in thinking about these terms. The definitions for these terms are far from clear cut and the literature indicates that there are various meanings attached to the terms. Schwarz (1996, p81) suggests the meaning of any word has a social history and its construction is more complex than is immediately apparent. The meaning of words changes as they are contested, rejected or accepted by a range of users.

Onel Brooks (2014 p 35) argues that our identifications and idealizations often make it very difficult for us to think about matters including race. He also argues that it is not easy to think about race and racism and when opportunities are presented to think about race and racism they are not always taken up.

2.3 Race

The word race is often used freely and without any specific or exact meaning. Darwin (1871, p214) said that that “racial differences imply genetic incompatibility”. Other authors Tizzard and Phoenix (1993), Lavalette and Penketh (2014p.ix) have argued that race is socially constructed. In considering dual heritage/mixed parentage children some authors such as

Katz and Treacher (2005, p.46) put forward a view that race is to do with blood, something inherent in the genes and a part of nature. There are myths about mixing of blood and mixing up of categories. For Small (1986), Banks (1992), and Maxime (1986) race has been viewed a factor which is potentially damaging for dual/mixed parentage children.

Fryer (1984) raises the notion of scientific racism when people are categorised into races. Okitikpi and Aymer (2010, p.68-69) remind us that race is referred to in legislation. The Race Relations Act 1976 was aimed at promoting equality in society and to prevent discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, nationality and ethnicity. It applied to everyone and it takes account of race, nationality and ethnicity. The aim was to value diversity and to ensure that people are able to be free from all forms of racial discrimination. I would say when people mention race they are usually thinking about discrimination and disadvantage. I will be applying this definition of race in this study.

2.4 Racism

Dominelli (1997) presents a model of racism, which considers personal factors, cultural factors and the institution. Lavalette and Penketh (2014, p. ix) propose that racism grew with the development of and the expansion of capitalism. They refer to the racism that motivated slavery. I have discussed this term further in the literature review Chapter 3.

2.5 Culture

Macdonald (2011, p.VII) defines culture as:

“identity which everyone has based on a number of factors such as memories, ethnic identity, family attitudes to child rearing, class, money, religious or other celebrations, division of family roles according to gender or age. Cultures are neither superior nor inferior to each other. They are constantly evolving for individuals and communities.” Okitikpi and Aymer (2010, p143) define:

“cultures as all about meanings we give to events. They raise critical issues such as identity and belonging. All cultures carry with them history, beliefs and ways of doing things.”

For example, people from different cultures will have different experiences of migration and of trauma. One could argue the domination of the white culture is a continuation of colonisation. It also appears groups that are in need of health and welfare services come disproportionately from cultures that are dominated.

I have adopted Okitiki and Aymer's definition of culture for the purposes of this study.

2.6 Black

The word black has defined people who suffer racism because of their skin colour. In the context of British society, it normally refers to those of African, Caribbean and South East Asian origin. However, I do not think the term is straightforward as the term assumes a single black culture. Black and race have become intertwined. Owusu-Bempah (2005, p.28) discusses the one drop of black blood rule. In 1705, the State of Virginia passed a law classifying mulatto, the child or grandchild of a Negro as black. Further racial classifications were made on physical features which created categories of the offspring of "mixed bloods". Also the racial classification for the dual heritage offspring of mixed relationships was viewed as black.

In this thesis, black refers to groups that are discriminated and subject to racism as a result of skin colour, speaking a different language, or belonging too certain marginalised cultural and racial groups. Currently, the groups that appear at the forefront of discrimination and abuse are Muslims (Islamophobia) and communities from Eastern Europe.

Dauids (2011, p.1) comments I think are very relevant:

"to be black in a white world is an agony. At every turn, you are confronted by hidden stereotypes that can spring to life in a flash, push violently into you, destabilise you and make you feel and act in ways that are wholly determined from the outside as if you are yourself had no say in the matter."

In the 1970's many black professionals sought a common understanding so the term "black" was a unifying and collective term used to describe black and ethnic minority people

struggling against racism and committed to challenging the behaviour and attitudes of racist individuals and institutions. Sivanandan (1991, p.34) suggested that the politicised definition of black helped to form the black community in Britain. Black has been used as a unifying political term. In this study this is the way the expression is deployed.

2.7. Minority Ethnic and Ethnicity

Schaefer (1993) defines a minority group as a subordinate group whose members have significantly less control or power over their lives than members of a dominant or majority group. Schaefer's argues the term is used interchangeably with the subordinate group and refers to a social group that experiences a narrowing of opportunities (success, education, wealth, etc.) by comparison with the rest of society.

Macdonald (1991, p.VI) defines minority ethnic as:

"belonging to a cultural, racial or religious group that is numerically smaller than the predominant white Protestant majority power base in the United Kingdom. This includes groups visible by their skin colour, as well as others such as Irish, Jewish, Polish, Turkish and Travelling people. Belonging can come either through personal identification with a group or the allocation by others or individuals to it."

I have used this meaning in this study.

2.8 Ethnicity

Some authors such as Begum (1995, p.155) have commented that this term replaces the term race and it means non-white.

Lavalette and Penketh (2014, p.x) define ethnicity as referring to a group possessing a degree of coherence, solidarity, sharing common origins and interests. There is a sharing of experiences. Ethnicity refers to the features of this group that makes the group distinct and can pass from one generation to the next. Ethnicity can weaken as successive generations question its validity.

2.9 Islamophobia

Abbas (2005, p.11) has defined Islamophobia; “as the fear or dread of Islam or Muslim.”

The Runnymede Trust (1997) compared Islamophobia to Xenophobia. Lavalette and Penketh (2014, p.xii) define Islamophobia as a form of racism. They further argue, that Islam is presented as “irrational, barbaric and sexist and as inferior to Western culture.” In addition to this they explain:

“anti- Muslim hostility becomes normalised and is used to justify discriminatory policies and practices.”

For this study Islamophobia is viewed as a form of racism. Islamophobia was mentioned by two participants, Chris and Andy.

2.10 Oppression/anti-oppressive practice/anti-discriminatory practice.

Dominelli (2004) highlights that anti-oppressive/anti-discriminatory practice has a long history in the social work profession. Anti-discriminatory practice is a fundamental task alongside all the other skills required to undertake social work.

I would endorse for this study the idea that anti-oppressive/anti-discriminatory practice has a political foundation and it is a key task for all social workers and it has humanity at its core. It is also complex area. Lavalette and Penketh (2014, p.x) provide a wide ranging definition of oppression and this indicates in my opinion the complexity of the term oppression.

“systematic social practices that result in inhumane, degrading and unequal treatment of individuals or groups in society and with injustices linked to the dominance of particular groups over others. Oppression is socially constructed. It may make reference to supposed biological categories, it reflects to a series of social practices that have developed within particular historical circumstances. Oppression can take place on the basis of class, race, gender, disability, age and sexuality. Anti-oppressive practice is underpinned by a requirement that social workers understand the nature of oppression in society and how it affects service user groups.”

2.11 The questions

I have already outlined the questions that I asked each of the participants in chapter 1. To recap

I asked the independent social work experts:

I am interested in your reasons for taking on this assessment where race and culture are an important feature of this assessment. I am interested in your personal reasons for taking on the assessment and your experiences from taking on this work. Please take as much time as you want.

I asked the Commissioners:

I am interested in your reasons for commissioning an independent social work expert where race and culture are an important feature of this assessment. I am interested in your experiences. Please take as much time as you want.

For the Parent(s)

I am interested in your experience of this assessment where an independent social work expert undertook the assessment. I am interested in your experiences. Please take as much time as you want.

2.12 The case studies

In this chapter I have outlined the four case studies. I have summarised the case studies in table 1.

Table 1.

Case 1 Andy (independent social work expert). Andy was born in Eastern Europe and brought up in South Africa. His family are Catholics Bernice(commissioner). Bernice is White/British. Her religion is unknown. The parents were unable to be interviewed as they were angry with the outcome and did not answer any of the mobile telephones provided. The parents are Indians from Goa. They are Catholics.
Case 2 Chris (independent social work expert). Chris is of dual heritage African/Caribbean/ White/British. No specific religion was identified. Davina(commissioner) is Pakistani/British. She is a Christian. Edward(father) is from the Middle East. He is a Muslim.

Case 3 Eve (independent social worker). **She is of Chinese/British origin. Her religion is unknown** and Jane (commissioner) **her religion is also unknown.** The mother died one year after children placed with her **and her religion was unknown. She was born in Vietnam and taken to China.**

Case 4 Ivy (social worker). **Ivy is from the Sudan and is a Christian and Jessica (manager). She is a Christian.** (this is a slightly different case as it is project which offers an expert witness service to a particular cultural and racial group.) The parents became depressed after losing their children and did not wish to take part in the interview. **The parents are also from Sudan and are Christians.**

2.13 Case Study 1 Andy

Background

Andy is an independent social worker of Eastern European descent who was brought up in South Africa. He trained in community social work in South Africa. Andy agreed to participate after I advertised on the website of the National Association of Guardian Ad Litem and Reporting Officers. I met Andy in a public place. Prior to the interview, I explained the research and I emailed him the consent form **and** information leaflet. Andy agreed to take part **in the research.** He agreed for the interview **to be** recorded. When I met Andy he informed me that he had met with his bank manager to secure a loan. He was worried about not getting any work as an independent social work expert. As it was lunch time I offered to buy Andy lunch and the interview took place over lunch. **Prior to the tape recorder being switched on. Andy spoke about his work and made reference to his assessments.** He spoke about culture:

"I don't think there has actually been any case where I **have** been specifically asked about issues of culture, but that it always come up, in the way that culture is part and parcel of everything that you do. So it is what I say to take account anyway when we looking at assessments and when I am doing assessments."

2.14 Framework

He informed me that he uses the welfare checklist as the basis for his assessments. From this list he includes culture as a specific factor. He explained in his opinion in some cases he felt that culture was more prominent. He believed that he had been commissioned to undertake the assessments as opposed to anything specific in terms of race and culture.

Andy informed me, he selected the assessment, as he felt the parents would meet with me. He stated that he had a good relationship with them and they had invited him for a meal and he shared the outcome of the assessment over a meal. He felt sure that they would meet with me. Andy went on to explain that he had chosen an assessment where domestic violence was a feature and the family originated from a specific region in India. He explained that attempts had been made to match the family with a culturally appropriate worker, but this had not been possible. He also stated that there were issues around confidentiality within the community and interpreters being sacked as they all seemed to have had some contact with the family and were colluding with the family. Andy believed it was an advantage not coming from the same community that this family originated from. He compared it to an assessment he had completed where the family had been from the same part of Eastern Europe that he **originated** from and he explained that the assessment had been a disaster. Andy agreed that I could switch on the tape recorder and he proceeded to explain the context of the assessment.

2.15 Context of the assessment.

Andy informed me both of the parents had learning difficulties. **The** Mother's learning difficulties were more profound than the father's learning difficulties. At the centre of this assessment were two children. He explained the couple had older children, but the focus of this assessment **were** the 10 and 12-year-old. Andy was clear that both children were old enough to express a view. He stated that there were concerns around domestic violence, and mental health issues. The mother had threatened to harm herself and the children. He identified poverty

as an issue as the family had just moved to the UK. He identified some immigration issues as the couple were not able to access any support services. He also identified a connection with Goa and from this he identified religion as an issue for the parents.

The parents came to the attention of social services, due to **the** father's inability to provide for the children. He was unable to work or access services. Neglect and poverty became an issue as the parents were unable to feed and maintain the children. Housing was also an issue as the family were living in one room in a hostel.

In his words, "the children were going to school hungry and asking the teachers for food." Andy felt that he could understand where the parents and children were coming from and one of the areas he was able to understand was the domestic violence.

2.16 Domestic violence

Andy explained:

"I could understand where they came from to a certain extent not a lot. I could understand they were from a different world, from a different mindset of how they were thinking of family. In respect of the domestic violence, the family is the most important thing. Whatever happens that is it for life, until death do us part."

He further explained:

"my family have some similarities. I could relate to them. I could understand where they were coming from as they would not separate no matter what."

Andy was concerned that the mother was not being represented properly. In his words:

"when I initially got the case both parents were represented by the same solicitor I had issues around that whether they should be separately represented."

Andy felt more positive about the mother. He stated:

"the mother was more able as a result of the assessment to focus on the children. To sort of meet their needs and to understand them. However, there were limitations in her understanding. There were lots of issues about control. The father was not able to focus on children. There were stages in the proceedings where they separated and they got back to together again sort of thing."

2.17 Cultural issues.

Andy described the cultural issues from his point of view:

“There were lots of cultural issues, the interpreter, **the** Goan community. **It** is small community **and** there was a belief from the community no matter what the children should be there with their parents.”

Andy felt that there was some impact on the children as a result of the pressure from the community. Also the priest had written to the Local Authority.

2.18 Use of mediation skills.

Andy explained within the process of the assessment. He had used his mediation skills. In his words:

“I was trying to work out the compromise. The children were initially placed with a foster carer. She was a Muslim carer. There were issues with the father about religion and culture but a kinship carer, **the** mother’s sister was assessed. They eventually moved to the sister. That was my recommendation.”

2.19 Nature of conflict.

Andy explained that he had **previously** undertaken assessments for the Local Authority.

“I was commissioned directly by the Local Authority. All the families I have assessed for this Local Authority(five) in total have been “Asian families”, except one family.”

Andy explained that he had a good relationship with the Local Authority. I observed in this case there was not the kind of conflict that has existed in the other cases. However, underneath the surface there **were** some complex issues that were going on. Andy identified the domestic violence between the parents. He explained this was why he had been instructed by the Local Authority. It was difficult for the allocated female social worker to work with the father in particular. Also Andy had worked with another “Asian” family from the same part of India as this particular family and the Local Authority trusted him to undertake this assessment. He was considered a safe practitioner who understood how this particular Local Authority worked. Andy explained:

“the Local Authority were worried that the interpreters used from the local community also knew the family.”

The parents had sought help from the local Priest. Andy felt that he as a “non-Asian” had less danger of colluding with the parents. Although he shared a meal with the parents. He felt he was clear with his boundaries. He felt that having a meal made it easier for him to break the news of the outcome of his assessment.

2.20 Positioning

Andy felt some sympathy for the parents and he felt he was able to form a relationship with the parents. He also felt that he understood the concerns of the Local Authority. **As he was from a** different cultural background, he felt that there was less danger of collusion with the family. This was based on his experience of a case where the family he assessed had been from a similar background to him. He felt coming from a similar background caused problems.

2.21 Racism

Andy made a link in excluding the interpreter meant that the parents had to speak English.

He felt this was “racist” as it meant the parents were unable to communicate properly as their English was poor. He stated:

“the father could speak some English, but the mother’s English was quite poor. She was unable to speak to the children.”

Andy also raised the parent’s comments about the foster parents. The parents were worried that their children may become “terrorists as the foster carers were Muslim.” Andy felt their views were “racist”.

2.22 Anti-discriminatory/Anti-racist practice.

Andy informed me that he recognised the poverty, language issues, housing and immigration issues for the parents. He felt very uncomfortable when there was no interpreter present for

some of the contact observations. He felt that he had tried to build up a relationship with the parents. This is why he felt that he could share a meal with them.

2.23 Boundaries

The issues around boundaries was very real in this case. Andy explained the parents had tried to push the boundaries with the interpreters. One interpreter had developed a relationship with the parents and **the interpreter** met with them outside of the sessions. This was discovered by the professionals. The interpreter was “sacked” and it meant that the parents had no interpreter for the next 2-3 months over the Christmas period. However, the contact still went ahead and restrictions put into place; which meant the parents were unable to speak their mother tongue. Although Andy felt that it was easier to come from a different background. He also breached boundaries by having a meal with the parents. Following this meal his relationship with the parents, particularly the father broke down.

In the interviews with Andy, I felt there was something missing. It appeared that he had missed something out. This became apparent after the tape recorder was switched off.

2.24 Reflection/ Supervision stepping back.

Andy informed me in supervision there is no chance to talk about “one’s early experiences.” I felt that he became aware through the process how important this was. After the second interview I received an email from Andy stating that he was worried about taking part in the research because he was worried that his identity would be revealed. I met with him again this time in his home. He wanted a meeting in his home as he was unable to travel to the Tavistock Clinic. By visiting his home, I learnt more about him as I entered into his space. It was during this meeting he revealed to me that he had been in care.

The case he presented made him think about his own experiences and how he was able to understand the children in the case. In his words:

“So yeah in that way I could identify with the children. The whole secrecy of it. If the children were going to be rehabilitated to the parent’s care. The parents would consistently say that there was a need to keep it secret. They were consistently saying that it had all been resolved. So in that way it did it gave the insight into how the children were thinking and the harm that it had caused.”

He was able to link his material, the case and the need for supervision. He informed me that he had kept his cards close to his chest. This made him think about having therapy and the cost of therapy meant it was something he could not afford.

“It is more my financial situation; it is trying to find funds for it. Yeah I was speaking to a friend of mine who is in therapy and I was looking at other options.”

I wondered if my invitation to the Tavistock clinic made Andy think about therapy and supervision and his desire for this. I also wondered if I had broken a boundary by going to his home. In this way like the interpreter I had got drawn in as the parents had drawn in the interpreter. My overwhelming impression was how lonely and difficult this work must have been for Andy and the link between supervision and therapy for him. Andy like the other independent social work experts presented a case that had strong links with his own experiences. I will discuss this further in the chapter Biographical Connections.

I am also aware since these interviews Andy has sought and found a supervisor for his work and he is now working as a part of a team. It was apparent to me from this interview that Andy has been able to reflect and recognise that working in isolation is not the best practice.

2.25 Bernice commissioner of Andy.

2.26 Background

Andy provided Bernice’s details. I emailed Bernice to enquire if she wanted to take part. I sent her the consent form and information leaflet. She agreed to take part in the interview and I agreed to meet her in her office.

2.27 Context

However, when I arrived in her office. I noted that she was busy and preoccupied with another case. She spoke about a Pakistani family and an assessment of a Pakistani family that was really bothering her. She informed me that she did not have the skills to work and assess Pakistani families. She then went on to talk about an organisation responsible for international assessments. They commissioned an assessor abroad to undertake an assessment of a family in India (but she had thought it was a Pakistani family which turned out to be an Indian family in India not Pakistan). The quality of the assessment had been very poor and it had left the Local Authority in a difficult position. After revealing this, Bernice focused on the question that I posed to her. She agreed for the interview to be taped.

2.28 Positioning

She informed me the lawyers (legal team) were involved in instructing the independent social work expert, but the social work team had a great deal of input. She explained that the reason for using an independent social worker on the case was due to:

“major difficulties in finding someone that could speak the language spoken by the parents. They had tried to use the local community organisations, but there was a difficulty in that the people they were using knew the family and other family members. The department felt that it would be fairer to use an independent social worker who also had the language skills and did not know the family members. There were serious issues in this case about confidentiality.”

Bernice believed that the fairest way to get around this was to use an independent social worker who would maintain confidentiality. She revealed further complexities. She described difficulties with the father’s personality. In her own words:

“He dwelled on the past and would not move on. He kept referring to the past. He also had a powerful grip on his wife. She had learning difficulties. This did not initially come out due to the language issues and her command of English was very poor. This meant it was not clear whether she had language or learning difficulties.”
She added:

“this poor woman had no chance. He would continue to manipulate and control her. Her English was very poor. We did not know how much of this was a lack of understanding or learning

difficulties. The children were also placed in a difficult situation There were lots and lots of forms 78(domestic violence referrals) coming in. This made it difficult for the independent social work expert to complete the assessment in the way that he would have liked to. The father would not move forward as he lived in the past. The mother was terrified that father would come back. The children had been placed within the maternal family and they are doing well. But Father continued not to abide by the rules. The children were fine and happy in the placement.”

2.29 Conflict

There appeared to be no real conflict between Bernice and Andy.

Bernice explained the independent social work expert:

“had his head around about what the case was about. It was impossible to get the language that was required. We did not get a view from mum, because he was so controlling. This woman was fearful of saying anything. There was domestic violence from the mother to the father and she was in a police cell. This woman was trying to protect herself. She had no choice to do what she did, she had to protect herself.”

Bernice felt that Andy had completed a very good assessment and was pleased. She also stated that his most of his recommendations had come true.

Bernice did experience pressure from the parents and a local priest. There was also the complication that interpreters from the community were colluding with the parents. This was a source of conflict. The allocated social worker was female and **the** father posed a risk to her.

2.30 Her views about independent social work.

She felt in this case an independent social work expert was required. The allocated social worker had been threatened by father and it was felt that it was better for the case to have a male social worker. She felt that this had worked in this case. She explained how she preferred the allocated social worker to undertake **the** assessments. She added she would not have any idea of Pakistani influences.

“I would not have a clue. It is a whole different mindset where those people are coming from.”

2.31. The parents.

It was not possible to interview the parents. I was unable to get hold of them. I tried the various numbers provided but to no avail. I was informed by Andy and Bernice the parents were angry and had disengaged with all professionals.

2.32. Case Study 2

Chris

2.33. Background

Chris is an independent social worker and psychotherapist. He agreed to take part in the research and he was given the consent form and information about the research by email. The interviews with him took place in his consulting room. He asked me to sit in the chair that is normally used by his patients.

He agreed for the interviews to be tape recorded. In response to the first question, Chris went straight to the issues as he saw them. He informed me that he had just finished this case and he chose the case as it was still fresh in his mind. However, as the story emerged it became apparent that there was more to this initial comment.

2.34. Context

In the first meeting, Chris wanted to tell me more about himself. He did not say much about the assessment or provide information about the case. He moved very quickly into speaking about his personal biography. In the second interview he spoke more about the case. He moved from the paranoid-schizoid state to a more depressive state of mind and was able to talk about it more clearly and he was able to reflect more. In the first meeting Chris was very preoccupied with himself and how he had been treated.

The assessment involved a man from the Middle East who formed a relationship with a woman who had mental health difficulties. The woman made allegations against the man stating there

had been domestic violence. There were also concerns in respect of the man's immigration status and right to remain in the UK. He had no family in the UK to support him. The Local Authority removed the child. Chris completed an assessment of the father and recommended that the child to be rehabilitated to his care. It appears from his account this may have been a controversial recommendation, due to the previous concerns about domestic violence in the relationship with the birth mother and the child was female.

2.35. Culture and religion.

Chris explained that he was "not from the same culture or heritage as the father". But despite this he understood him and was able to assess him. He spoke about how previously his credibility and assessments had been challenged.

2.36. Racism

Chris raised his assessment had been challenged, but in this case despite another expert being commissioned his assessment was correct. Chris had been very stirred up with the professional dynamics in the case. He believed if the father had not been a Muslim male he would have been treated differently. In his words:

"I think if he was a Middle Eastern woman, female child I think there will be less distrusting.

It is because he is a man. Muslim man and it is a little girl. They have not been ready to accept that he can do it."

He further explained he was not accusing any professional of being racist. He felt that the Children's Guardian may have been just concerned about the child, but there was some form of racial anxiety in respect of a Muslim father parenting a Muslim daughter.

2.36. Positioning

He explained how his assessment was challenged and he was asked to go back to reassess and another expert was brought in to assess. For Chris it was simple. The father was warm, he demonstrated empathy. He was able to work with professionals. He assessed him to be a good father who could parent his daughter competently.

2.37. Conflict

There was a high level of conflict in this case and Chris was upset during the first interview.

He spoke about getting attacked by the Children's Guardian and having to defend himself. He felt it centred around the issue of race and racism. He went on to say:

"I am realising this more overtly the black people involved in the case were very quickly ok with him and it was the white Guardian who was not having none of it and this was after I had done two reports."

He explained how he had tried to speak to the Guardian. In his words:

"she never returned a telephone call that I made to her. Sometimes that happens. Some people just say go and do your assessment and I do not want a conversation with you about it. Some are happy to go through the process with you. I was shocked that she had never seen him with the child or observed a contact or observed a contact right up until she left. Umm I wasn't too aware of tensions. As an independent social worker you tend to go away and get another phone call and you answer the questions and sometimes this is sort of ok as circumstances actually change. He did to some extent and he got leave to remain and he was able to get state benefits and housing and all that."

He added the child had informed the Guardian that she did not want to live with him. He believed

this had impacted on the Guardian's thinking. He was unable to speak to the Guardian directly

so he did not understand what was going on from her point of view. Again in his words:

"I can't get a sense of what more happened in the case, as I never actually spoke to this Guardian."

Chris appeared upset over not having a direct conversation with the Children's Guardian. He explained:

"I never went through a direct process with her and I think I probably would have got a harder time in court. If there had not been a change of Guardian. I think the tensions went on, but they were not explicit."

Chris was upset that another expert was brought in to counter his assessment. He recommended contact between the father and child to increase so the father had a real taste of being a parent. I did say there is a need to intensify the contact between him and the child so that it is positive. You need to give him a taste of what it was like to be with his daughter for longer periods **of time**. This created tension between the professionals and the Guardian brought in another expert to counter his position.

Chris admitted that he felt angry with the Children's Guardian. He explained:

"I just want to fucking get her. I was going to get her."

He explained further that he did not want to **physically beat her**. In his words:

"I just wanted to look at her face, whilst she gave her evidence. However, I did not get a chance as she went off sick."

2.38. Anti-discriminatory/ Anti-racist practice

Chris thought about the wider issues affecting the father he was assessing and the child.

He went into the community to assess him and went to the father's place of work and met his colleagues and he also went to his home. He had an awareness of the impact of immigration, housing and poverty on the father. He **also** had an awareness of gender issues and issues relating to the father being a Muslim. He appeared to draw out the strengths of the father and understand the needs of the dual heritage child. He drew on his own experience of being dual heritage.

"Dad was Middle Eastern; mum was mixed heritage French. Black Caribbean French. Um you see I am not from his culture. I do not speak his language; I am not Muslim. I suppose I have to talk gender if this is about race I have to talk gender as well. I was able to engage him as a man of colour. Umm I was able to engage **with** him in ways that some of other professionals obviously had not. When other professionals did develop his trust and um it paid dividends. Umm I think I was particularly credible with the other experts who were all white. umm I felt that they listened to me."

2.39. Reflection/ Supervision/ Ability to step back

In the second interview, Chris was more reflective. He explained the battering he had received from the Children's Guardian was difficult and if he had been less experienced he may not have been able to cope or manage with the attack on his professionalism. He realised that he had pressed some buttons in the Children's Guardian as well. In his words;

"I know the notion of a man looking after a child and a man getting picked **on** to look after a child over above a woman and a man of colour above a woman be she white or of colour. I think I pressed some buttons, **because of** what actually happened in this case."

Chris also revealed in the second interview that he met his birth father. There appeared to be a link in the case he presented and his own personal material. He explained that his experiences made him want to work in a more creative way with the families. Chris has trained as a psychotherapist and has been in therapy. He explained;

"It motivates me to be creative and to do some proper thinking. I am in group analysis at the moment. My training has helped me to manage myself. I always make sure I have good holidays. I splash around in the sea. I write as well. I do have external consultation sometimes."

2.40 Interview of Davina Commissioner of Chris

2.41 Background

Initially, I tried to interview the team manager. The team manager did agree and **he** was very keen to meet me at the Tavistock Clinic. However, he left the department suddenly. I am unclear what happened to him. I interviewed the senior social worker instead who took over the commissioning role. She was also familiar with the assessment. She was provided with the consent form and information leaflet. She agreed to take part in the research.

I met her in her office and she agreed for the interview to be tape recorded.

2.42 Context.

In response to the first question, she informed me that there was no particular reason for choosing this independent social worker. She informed me that the Local Authority social worker

did not have time to undertake the detailed parenting assessment; due to their work load. Although the allocated social worker had a feel of the case and felt that the father's parenting was good enough and the child should be placed with him, but the case took so long with a number of assessments. She was a Pakistani Christian and she felt she had some understanding of the complexities of race and culture.

2.43 Conflict

She picked up the tensions in the case. She explained how she perceived the conflict:

"Umm what I have picked up in the meetings is that there were some tensions. I think to resolve these tensions professionals need to be open minded and they have to have regular contact with the parents. To see what they are doing, what interactions with the child and clear observations need to be made to make the decision. The person who was the professional might be thinking that she is right to **make** a fair decision on the case. That is why she is asking for an addendum reports and more and more assessments."

She had her own view of the father and was very positive about him. Again in her words:

"I visited the parent a lot. I could see. You can see now and it is brilliant and the child is so well behaved."

She was concerned about the delay in the case and it should have been concluded a long time ago.

She also picked up the issues in respect of race and culture. She stated:

"race and culture was one of the complexities in this case. This child was mixed race of different ethnicity."

However, she was unable to explain the conflict in her words:

"I cannot comment on behalf of other people what was going on in their heads."

2.44 Her views of about independent social worker.

In respect of her views about the independent social worker. She commented:

"there were no specific reasons in our mind when we chose him. He was available at that time within the timescale he was quite suitable to do the assessment. The other thing which was a big concern was the psychological and parenting assessment needs to be together. He was

available within the time limit to do the assessment. I think his background is from a psychological aspect as well so that is why we chose him. Although there were racial differences in terms of the origin between the parent and him. Even I do not know what racial origin he is from. We suggested that he can meet the timescale of the court.”

She informed me that there was no thought about race and cultural issues. But thought it was helpful. She commented further:

“it is really helpful if the assessor is from the same background. That really helps.” She also stated that more thought does need to go into choosing the assessor but “because of the timescale we have to go with what is available.”

She further explained:

“social workers do not have time to do assessments on parents. It is a very time consuming process, while we are doing nitty gritty things. They are doing everything whatever is on the case. No the allocated social worker would not have time. They cannot do quality work and the assessment would have been rushed.”

She was concerned about the delay caused by the independent social worker having to repeat the assessments. In her words:

“it should have been concluded within the timescale. That was what I was saying time and time again.” I asked her “what was going on for you in this case?” She replied “it was drifting and it depends on the Judge. Even in the final hearing the Judge was not convinced. The other Guardian was appointed as well. She inherited her own views. Judges need to be firmly balance the views and opinions of the professionals.”

2.45 Interview of Edward, the father in the case

2.46 Background

I visited Edward’s home. He met me at the station as his home was very difficult to find. I was very struck when I saw him walking towards the station with his daughter how close they were and how happy she looked. I could see the warmth and love between them. I instantly felt that he was a good father. His daughter appeared so happy and animated. His response towards me was that he was very pleased to see me. I accompanied him to his home. He lived in a top floor flat in a house **which was** very clean, and child centred. It is a one bedroom flat and he had given the bedroom to his daughter. **He slept in the living room.**

2.47 Positioning.

In response to the question. He was pleased that an independent social worker was appointed on the case. In his words:

“For me it is the good way at least he can make the difference. If you put an independent person in a case like my case. He can make the difference. He is not from the social work dept or the Government dept. He can find a lot of the things about this person. May be sometime there are some people that I think sometimes they are not honest. Sometime yeah, especially the first Guardian I never met her for 16 months. She never comes to me and she never talked to me. She has no idea of my daughter. She is treating me like someone from the Africa. I am not from Africa, I am from the Middle East and it is a different mentality, different culture. She saying like Middle East people are violent. In the court when my solicitor was talking in the room. She told me that she is talking that it is as if you are from the Middle East that you violent. I said I am not. She never spoke to me when we had the LAC meeting when I spoke to her. She made a face, I can feel that this person is not honest. In the end she was sick and they had to bring another Guardian. She said it is ok.

She agreed with the plan and everything.”

2.48 Views of the independent social work expert.

He expressed his opinion about the independent social worker:

“For me Chris is one who made the difference. He helped me by talking. We met I think many, many times. Even here in my flat, my accommodation before, in cafe and he saw how the people treated me. Yeah I was able to talk to him. I feel like, I was feel free to talk to him. I talked about things from my heart. My experience in my life what I am going to do in the future. He is honest. It is better now for me. No one is going to say a, b or c. Even I had assessment from the social worker. It is ok. Even I know how to cook. He asked me to cook for my daughter. I can do many things I am a baker. Look at this man he is very honest. I had a lot of accusations. Many things. For me when I see the report of Chris. I thought sometimes when I saw Chris. He is telling the truth. He is talking in my place. I said no he is the one. I don't mix and make a mess. I will stop and we will see the future what is happening. In the meantime, speaking to my solicitor I was feeling Chris is a good man. He is going to make the difference. He understood where I am coming from. It made no difference that he was a man. He is honest that is it.”

2.49. Case Study 3

2.50 Eve Independent Social Work expert

2.51 Background.

Eve is a very experienced independent social worker. She has been a team manager and a Guardian ad Litem and now works as an independent social work expert. She agreed to take part in the research after seeing the advert in NAGALRO to take part in the research. I sent her the consent form and information leaflet. She consented to the interviews. Our first meeting took place in a café following an appointment she had with a family. The second meeting took place in her home.

She agreed for the interviews to be tape recorded. Her responses in both interviews indicated to me that she had thought about her practice and her move into expert witness work. She spoke about herself more in the first interview and focused more on the case in the second interview. She selected a case of a lone mother from Vietnam who had both her children removed and there had been domestic violence and issues around drugs, isolation and vulnerability.

Eve's response to the question was very detailed. It also gave me the impression that she had thought about why she wanted to do this work with great care and it has been a journey for her.

2.52 Context

Eve felt the mother was able to parent and she expressed criticisms and concerns about the current foster placement for the children and she felt the mother had changed and was able to demonstrate emotional warmth. Eve explained the differences in how parents from South East Asia may demonstrate emotional warmth. She informed me that the foster placement appeared culturally appropriate and this is the reason she felt the children had been placed there. She stated that the foster carers had rejected the son in particular who had made allegations. She

indicated that the foster carers did not show emotional warmth and the foster home was not geared to look after the two children. The foster carers son was the same age as the boy and they ended up fighting. The boy alleged that he was hit by the foster father. There was an investigation into the allegations. Eve explained although the foster carers were cleared. The foster carers were angry and rejected the two children. **As a result, they** had to be moved. Due to the children moving around it was important that the mother was assessed fairly.

2.53 Positioning

Eve assessed the mother to be caring and emotionally warm towards her children.

She described her observation of the birth mother:

“when I saw them in the home they **lived in an** attic room on the top of the house. It was not a big place. Umm they were so much more contained. I think mother showed that she is able to cope and was very good in doing all, giving them boundaries and she was able to incorporate a lot of the things that she learned.”

Eve found a positive change in the birth mother. She linked her own experiences to the experiences of this mother and her own mother in the second interview. She explained the sense of duty parents from South East Asia sometimes felt towards their children. In her words:

“the duty of a parent is to make sure that you provide for a child and look after the child.”

She assessed the mother as being very committed to her children:

“Despite all the ups and downs in her relationship and the domestic violence. Her commitment towards her children did not waiver.”

She also explained:

“in this case unusually social services were very impressed with her, with her commitment. They supported her to get rehoused, **to start a parenting course**. This was despite the Guardian wanting the children to remain with the foster carer.”

Eve made a connection with her own mother, in her words:

“she was similar to my own mother”. She was “steadfast”, “putting the needs of her children first”.

She explained that the mother did not let anything interfere in her contact with her children. Eve noted a great transformation in the children. She compared seeing the children in the large home of the foster carer and the small flat of the mother in the attic and how the children related to their mother. She noted a great transformation in the children. The children were more settled, instead of running all over the home (as they did in the foster home). She noted a sense of security and belonging for the children. She observed them eating noodles. She noted a more secure attachment between the children and their mother. The older boy encouraged his younger sister to listen and follow their mother's instructions.

Eve felt, he was a role model to his younger sister. She noted that he had been bored in the foster placement. She assessed the children to be calmer and more contained by their mother and there was sense of belonging.

2.54 Nature of the conflict

Eve did not explain the background of the assessment to me in the way that Jane did. She went straight to talk about what the central issues were and they centred around the point of conflict within the assessment. She explained the difficulties in the foster placement where the children were placed. She explained that the children (whose parents were from Vietnam were placed with a Vietnamese foster mother and a black African/Caribbean foster father. It was supposed to be a short term placement. The foster carers had one son who was the same age as the boy. The Guardian who was the commissioner wanted the children to remain in this foster placement on a long basis. However, Eve explained the foster carers:

"found it very difficult to cope with the two children and their own son and there were lots of problems."

Eve felt that the children should return to the birth mother as the mother had addressed some of the concerns raised about her ability to care for her children. In her own words:

"She went to a refugee therapy group and had a lot of counselling. She never stopped seeing the children and showing them that she loved them. Eventually she was able to convince social

services that the children should be given a chance to live with her and they did and that is a very good outcome except she is still an illegal immigrant. I don't know if she has been allowed to stay or not. Certainly the children's behaviour **improved**. The children were better behaved. I certainly felt that their behaviour totally improved when they realised that they were going back to mum and they listened to her more and they were much happier about being with her. They had been in care for nearly 18 months. They were listening to her more."

Another area of conflict for Eve was how the concept of physical punishment was perceived. She explained the concept of a sense of duty in "South East Asian families". She stated there is a "huge importance your duty to your children is always to look after them and a duty to parent. It was not a work type duty." Eve felt that the mother was able to understand the concerns of social services and work with them and change her way of looking after the children instead of being punitive. She further added:

"She was able to understand the way she was brought up was very different to how she would bring her children up. She had to change her parenting style as well."

Eve felt that her parenting was positive, she praised the children and was more physical with them. Eve stated that despite the conflict between her and the Children's Guardian.

The Guardian accepted her recommendation.

2.55 Racism

Eve did not speak about any direct racism. But she did speak about the difference in her perception of the children and the Guardian's perception of the children. Eve raised the different perceptions about parents from different parts of the world, particularly South East Asia. She also spoke about the sense of duty towards parenting. She explained that she was able to engage with the mother and help her to change. The commissioner however in her interview raised fears of being seen as a racist.

2.56 Anti-discriminatory/Anti-racist practice

Eve appeared to have a strong commitment towards anti-discriminatory/anti-racist practice. She explained how she engaged with the families that she assessed:

“The families are so much **more** prepared to talk to you and explain things. When I go and see a family they never stop talking for 2-3 hours. From the minute I entered the room; whereas I know that social workers **who** have interviewed with interpreters it is answer and question. They only answer what they have been asked and it is a very stilted communication.”

She spoke about the difficulties of using interpreters and how it assists the family members when you can speak the language. She spoke about assessing Chinese families. She explained:

“It is very difficult to interpret quite well and correctly. **It is** particularly more difficult talking and **using certain** terms, because Chinese is a very rigid language and there maybe only one expression for a word. Also social work language is difficult to interpret, especially when you are asking parents about child rearing practice, child focused **practice** etc.” She also explained that some of the interpreters originated from mainland China so their Mandarin may not be very good. So it makes it incredibly difficult for the right nuances to be interpreted and translated to the clients.”

She also explained;

“**A** lack of understanding from non-Chinese social workers in the way they write their reports and the way **they** judge parents is totally out of context to what the parent's situation is.”

Finally, Eve spoke about the concept of adoption in China. She explained that there was,

“nothing about protecting children in China. There are clear duties in Confucius society about looking after your children. Keep them safe; **teaching** them right or wrong and things like that. That is your duty. Everybody in Confucius society has a clear duty. The place of the child is to obey your parents. Everyone has their place, you keep your place and the place of the child is with your parent.”

She explained how parents may be seen to be harsh in China, particularly in respect of education. In China education is valued and again in her words:

“in Confucius society the only way to get out if you are born a peasant is to have actually have education. So that you can go to the Imperial exam in Beijing and if you get first prize you get a civil service job. The whole village will celebrate and there will be placard in your name to do that. That is another aspect of Chinese parents which has caused a lot of problems in care proceedings. Social Services and the school have found this parent too harsh, making this child practice the piano for 2 hours, and then making him or her do homework and not have time to play and the mother will say I have sacrificed everything.”

She further explained:

“in several cases there have been arguments and misunderstanding over the perception of the mother being too harsh, too restrictive on the child and children have been removed because of

that which was quite terrible. In my reports I always have sections dealing with relevant cultural issues.”

2.57 Reflection/Supervision/Stepping back

Eve explained that she chose to go into independent social work due to the difficulties in CAFCASS. She informed me that she used to speak to a colleague who was a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist who also specialised in assessing Chinese families. Eve also attended a support group. She also spoke to the solicitor that she worked with. She sometimes sought specialist consultation if there was a difficult case. Generally, she tried to live a balanced life. She went swimming and enjoyed reflexology. She also spoke about being a parent and gave me information about her own parenting, and **how proud she was her son had been successful.**

2.58 Jane Commissioner.

2.59 Background

Eve provided the details of the Commissioner Jane and I emailed Jane. Jane agreed to take part when I approached her by email. I sent her the consent form and information leaflet. However, after this I tried several times to meet with Jane and she agreed finally to meet me at the Tavistock Clinic. However, Jane did not arrive for the first meeting. When I contacted Jane she said she had the room **number** in her diary, but not the address. When Jane came to meet me. She was upset that I did not notify the receptionist, which room I was in. I had assumed since I had emailed the room to Jane, she would just come up to the room. I under estimated her anxiety of meeting me at the Tavistock clinic.

2.60 Positioning

Jane unlike Eve wanted to start from the beginning. She explained her role and her concerns. She informed me that Eve had been instructed in the final stages of the case. She explained that the case had been known to social services prior to her appointment.

There were issues around drugs. The mother was a "refused asylum seeker" and had obtained temporary housing. She explained the concerns around physical chastisement:

"there were accusations from neighbours that Andy been beaten. I can't remember the timing of all this. The proceedings started at the end of 2008 I think. And it had been on the reports that Andy had been hit and there had been an incident where the police had seen Andy in the back of the car with a bloody nose. There was no blood or anything and Ms C had hit him with her hand and she did admit that she had hit him, because he has repeated something that his father had said and swore at her."

Jane explained her role:

"so my job was then to try and find out obviously what was best for the children."

2.61 Conflict

Jane described how she found the children in the contact observations with their mother. Her interpretation of what she had observed was different to the observation of Eve.

"I first observed the children in contact and they were absolutely all over the place. They were climbing on cushions, climbing on sofas falling off at times in a fairly small room. And neither parent (I saw both parents separately with the children) could control the children. So I thought they were at risk from that if nothing else really. Um they were placed with foster carers who were, she was Vietnamese and he was from the Caribbean."

Jane explained how the mother was assessed by different experts and how she disagreed with the Local Authority:

"I mean the significant aspect of the case is that the social worker and I really disagreed. We just did not see it the same way. And the way the social worker interpreted the psychologist's report was that it was positive basically I did not see it that way. I could see that she had suggested that Ms C had common traits with those of a child abuser."

Jane felt that the psychologists report was quite thorough. She reported on the children's behaviour in contact and of the mother's ability to manage her children. Jane reached the same conclusion as the psychologist. Her concerns were, the quality of mother's early life.

She proceeded to explain that the mother told her that she had been sold by the woman who had brought her up and the person who brought her took her to China and she was beaten. She had a son and she had been beaten by a man.

She explained in her own words:

“I was concerned mother had been abandoned as a child and she had the most awful damaging experience and that was the conclusion that the Assessor had come to. It was this difference in opinion between the Local Authority and my myself that led to the instruction of Eve”.

Jane informed me that although she did not fully agree with Eve’s assessment she accepted it, but there was an element of doubt in her mind. She was particularly disappointed in the manner that the children were moved from the culturally appropriate foster placement. Jane did not observe the children in the way that Eve observed them and she was worried once placed with their mother they may not reveal any abuse.

2.62 Views of the independent social worker

Jane acknowledged that she had to accept Eve’s assessment. She explained that by the time that Eve was commissioned there was a break down between Jane and the birth mother. She perceived the mother as “emotionally distant,” but acknowledged that this may have been also because of the distance between her and the mother. She acknowledged that she had been worried. She felt that Eve’s report concentrated on the here and now. She felt there were gaps because Eve did not meet the extended family and it was not clear who mother’s support networks were. But she accepted the assessment and it was the Judge’s role to look at all the information. She also mentioned that I would see the mother and see how she was getting on with the children. After the tape recorder was turned off

Jane mentioned:

“you are always worried about being called a racist.”

She mentioned how she had taught social work students and some of her black students had colluded with the families that they were assessing.

2.63 Mrs C Mother.

Unfortunately, despite many attempts to locate Mrs C I did not meet her. I wrote a letter to her and I emailed the head teacher of the school where the children attended. I was informed by the

head teacher of the school by email that Mrs C had died from cancer and the children had been placed with a relative. I passed this information onto Jane and Eve. I learnt that neither had spoken to each other after the assessment had concluded.

2.64 Case Study 4 Ivy

2.65 Background

Ivy is a social worker, who works for a specialist project. The project provides an independent social work service. The project is unique in that there is an onsite supervisor. This meant this practitioner received regular ongoing supervision. It appeared an interesting model. Ivy and her Manager agreed to take part in the research, when I contacted them by email. I sent them the consent form and information leaflet.

2.66 Context.

I asked Ivy if she agreed for the interview to be tape recorded and she agreed.

Ivy described a case where the parents came from the same African country as herself. She explained that she did not know this family until the family presented at the service she works for. However, from her account by the time the family came to her service it was too late. She described how the parents moved around different boroughs and a number of their children were removed from their care. She explained that they were not familiar with the child protection system in the UK.

Ivy's **work involves working** with community and religious groups, **and empowering** families to help themselves. This family became **a part of** this group and this is how the project was able to offer them a service.

2.67 Positioning

Ivy was able to clearly describe the case and her approach appeared to be structured. She also expressed an emotional connection to the assessment that she described. The parents came from the Sudan. They came with their two children. Kay and Amy aged 7 and 9 years.

She explained that they were new to the country. They were very poor and did not know many people. She explained that they had fled from where they came from. They lost one child, due to medical complications prior to birth. In her words:

“I am not too clear about the reason why the child died and she carried on had another pregnancy and again um she lost the pregnancy very close to the time that she should have given birth so that she was having to deal with settling in the country. They fled from where they were coming from. Not being able to have much to settle in, not having any family members.”

The Local Authority became involved when one of the girls displayed sexualised behaviour.

The mother was depressed and father was trying to earn a living as a motor mechanic.

They did not understand the system as they were new to the country. She explained:

“Of course they did not understand the system. They were new in the country. There was no one to really explain to the system to them.”

She explained how the parents were struggling and the CP network of professionals were not helping them. She further explained in the Sudan there was no child protection system.

Ivy became involved when the couple's last baby was taken into care. She was concerned her project was called in at the very last minute. In her words:

“We are known in the community because of the work we do in the Christian places of worship so they let people know about us. So that is how they contacted us.”

2.68 Cultural issues

Ivy explained how she worked with local church groups and how she linked the families that they assessed with a community forum that they ran in the churches. The aim was to reduce the isolation for the parents. She was involved in raising cultural awareness by educating professionals. She also worked with the parents she assessed and tried to work alongside them to effect change.

2.69 Conflict.

Ivy was surprised it had taken the Local Authority so long to contact the project and by the time they had been contacted. It was too late, as decisions had already been made. She described

an incident where she accompanied her manager to meetings with the social work team. She was upset that she had been perceived as a support worker. This had left her upset, not valued and undermined.

She explained that the team she worked for offered a:

“reflective practice forum where the case is discussed and the team gave recommendations as to how the case would be approached. But unfortunately, they did not bring the case to the forum.”

She further explained that the family contacted them through the community. However, by that time it was too late for the family.

2.70 Reflection/Supervision/ Stepping back

Ivy informed me that she had fortnightly case supervision and case discussions. She valued the input of supervision and she felt supported. I also interviewed her Manager Jessica

She informed me we have regular supervision and case discussions. In her words;

“we have regular supervision and we have case discussions every 2 weeks. Because of the complexity of cases. I felt there was a need for a case discussion and help them through the case and contain the anxieties.”

She explained her method of supervision involved getting to know her workers and building up a trust so that they could talk to her and she helped to empower and enable them, but also to step back and not to get too over involved.

She explained how they supported the families through the community forums by sharing:

“food, talk and networking. The community forms prevent isolation for the families. It is a means of support.”

2.71 Summary

This chapter has presented the structural summaries of the case studies involving the research participants. I have broken down the material generated from the interviews into headings that draw out the themes that the participants presented to me. These summaries set the context for further discussion in chapters 5 to 8.

3. Chapter 3 Literature Review.

3.1 Introduction.

In this chapter, I would like to explore the literature that informs this study. As far I can see there is no research which completely matches this study. There is however important and relevant literature. It is crucial to explore the literature that explains the evolution of independent social work and the role of independent social work in a time of austerity and cut in public spending. This provides some understanding as to how independent social work developed and the difficulties and demands on independent social work at a time of austerity and cuts.

The first section of this chapter will explore the literature in respect of the role of the independent social work expert. This will include considering the role NAGALRO has played a part in the development of independent social work. NAGALRO is the Professional Association for Children's Guardians, Family Court Advisers and independent social workers. I refer to (<http://www.nagalro.com/about-nagalro/aimsand-structure.aspx>).

Racism has been thought about and discussed by Chris, Andy, Ivy and Jessica. It has featured throughout this study. **There are** a number of studies that **think** about racism. The second section will be exploring literature in respect of racism and anti-racist social work. I will be considering radical social work and anti oppressive/anti-discriminatory practice. I will also consider current forms of racism such as Islamophobia.

3.2 Four categories.

The final section of this chapter will consider the literature that helps to explain and understand the four categories derived from the fifteen supplementary research questions that have been developed from the original research questions that were put to the participants of the research. For the sake of clarity these are as follows:

- a) Category one cases/assessments presented by the independent social work experts/commissioners. The cases/assessments appear to have particular features. All the families/parents/children are from a particular ethnic minority background/ racial origin/cultural background. **How** factors such as structural inequalities, discrimination, alienation have had an impact on the assessment process.
- b) Category two (questions 4 and 6) relates to the framework of practice used by the expert social work practitioners/commissioners and how this has helped them to make a recommendation as to whether **or not** the child(ren) should be returned to the parents or whether they should be placed **with alternative families (foster, kinship carers or adoption) away from their parent(s)**.
- c) Category three (question 6 to 8) relates to the notion of conflict, which has featured in all of the material presented as all the assessments are in the context of court proceedings. Conflict is a natural process. The conflict may be as a result of the triangular relationships of the expert independent social worker, parent and commissioner. There are also conflicts between the professionals and anxiety from the commissioner projected onto the independent social work expert. Within this, there is a consideration of what may be going on consciously and unconsciously for the three participants. There is then the inter-relationship between myself and my research subjects. This leads to a consideration of thinking about all this to generate a more in-depth analysis of the data.

- d) Category four (Questions 9 to 15) is the ability **of the** independent social work experts to step back and the **specific** tools required for reflection and supervision and **to assist in the process of stepping back.**

3.3 The Role of Independent social work.

Eva Gregory and Sarah Saunders (2012) in their article “Putting ISWs On the Map: NAGALRO’S Role in Establishing Independent Social Work (published in Seen and Heard volume 22/issue3 September 2012) explain how independent social work came into being and evolved. In terms of the current role for independent social workers. They argue the role of the Children’s Guardian had **diminished**. After the traumatic impact of the baby Peter Connelly case, local authorities altered thresholds with a consequent increase in the applications that has continued over the last three years. (2012, p40). In their words:

“Solicitors and courts are increasingly turning to independent social workers as respected social work experts who can provide authoritative assessments of parenting and children’s needs and whose wealth of experience and knowledge provides a sound foundation for difficult court judgements.” (2012, p41).

Over the years, there have been many ideas that have been put forward for the use of experts. One of these is the need for parents to have a fair hearing under **Article 6** of the European Convention on Human Rights and the idea that an expert assessment will be independent of the parties and therefore fair to the parents.

The Munro Review (2011) set out some principles that apply to child protection social work. One of these was a system that values professional expertise.

I will now turn to research that considers the value of independent social work experts at times of resource and financial constraints. Thompson (2012) has argued the reliance on

independent social workers to fill the void left by Guardians who formerly performed critical reviews and extensive investigations, but are now constrained by larger caseloads and the proportionate working model introduced by CAFCASS (Children and Family Court Advisory Service). At the same time, Local Authorities are struggling with budget cuts and staff shortages with inexperienced staff who have to carry complex caseloads. The contribution of independent social workers is valued by the family courts because of the reliable expertise they bring.

There is other research which has considered the impact of resource cuts on the assessment and outcomes for parents and children within public and private law proceedings which is relevant to this research. There is a strong argument that the 26-week deadline for the completion of Care Proceeding does not allow sufficient time for robust assessments and the cap of 30 hours for the assessment of one parent and 40 hours for the assessment of two parents is not sufficient for detailed and robust assessments to be completed.

Waterhouse (2015 p 20 to 35) has argued that it is difficult to complete complex assessments within the current 26-week protocol. In her words:

“the challenge for the future will be whether the time and resources can be given by agencies and courts to permit practitioners to compete good quality assessments that can impact positively on care plans. A timescale for court proceedings of 26 weeks is barely compatible with this.”

Broadhurst (2014) has argued the family justice system needs to look at the dynamic interaction that is required on both sides to deliver positive outcomes. She argues that more time is required in pre-removal and pre-birth work with parents. This again points to the fact that 26 weeks for concluding Care Proceedings does not allow for sufficient time for parents to change and for robust and detailed assessments to be undertaken.

Cantwell (2015), makes a similar point in respect of private law assessments. He argues that more time and resources need to be given to these types of court assessments.

This relevance of this research for this study is that there is not enough time to produce high quality assessments within the 26-week time frame and there is even more need to have independent social work experts that have the expertise and confidence to analyse material quickly and within the time frames. Although the argument remains that parents may need longer to demonstrate that they can change and the current framework does not give them enough time to demonstrate this. This is relevant to this study as the complexities of assessing black and ethnic minority families may present more of a challenge (complexities around language, culture, other factors that are discussed further in this study). It may not be easy to complete the assessments within the 26-week time frame for public law proceedings.

The assessments presented in this research are all in public law proceedings.

3.4 Research evaluating the usefulness of Independent social work experts.

The research in this area is limited. Brophy (2006) and Masson (2008), have evaluated the usefulness of the independent social work experts. It appears the types of cases where independent social work experts may be instructed are cases where the evidence of significant harm is overwhelming, but it is considered reasonable to have yet another assessment of viability, requiring the parents to tell their story to yet another person who may well consider them unable to meet their child(ren)'s needs. Most cases examined by the court are those of long-term neglect, often involving substance misuse, learning difficulties, domestic violence or mental health issues or a combination of these problems. Brophy's (2012) research found that independent social work experts do not simply duplicate existing parenting assessments and cause delay or that there is high use by

parents seeking second opinion evidence based on human rights claims. The findings indicated in certain circumstances the courts might be hampered by not having an assessment by an independent social work expert. Particularly in cases managing to meet the six-month standard for completion of care cases as recommended by the Family Justice Review and accepted by the Government.

Previous research by Jessiman (2009) and Masson (2008) has shown a high percentage of cases about 40 per cent lacked an up to date core assessment when they go to court, and the new research indicates that local authorities continue to struggle to fulfil this key part of their duties with any consistency. Dr. Brophy's research found that that independent social work expert reports were of high quality, produced on time and that they did not contribute to delay.

Noel Arnold (2012) wrote on the Pinktape blog that parents have an inalienable right to disagree with the social worker's view and also to suggest the social worker has got it wrong, that it is part of the legal process. He cites several reasons for concern for placing complete reliance on a single view.

3.5 The Role of the National Association of Guardian ad Litem and Reporting Officers. (NAGALRO)

Nagalro (2010) highlighted the value of the social work assessment, which provides a holistic view, setting the assessment of psychiatric and psychological experts in to the context of the family. Social work expertise deals with areas of risk, assessment and parenting, exactly the areas that the court needs when coming to a judgment.

3.6 The Psychoanalytic perspective - looking underneath the surface.

A move away from the type of research into independent social workers mentioned so far has been the work of Stevenson (2012) who has argued the importance and value of independent social work experts making an important difference. He advocates that court experts actually recognise the complex organisational processes in operation within a child protection legal context so that the expert does not buckle under the impact of powerful projections and projective identifications, and the demands of the highly contested legal environment.

He also raises in his PhD thesis (2009, p224):

“I again considered the issue of race and how it was thought about throughout the process. Is the use of a black expert part of the armoury of the weapon or a shield culture of the assessment process? Or, is it simply another aspect of a case of ‘Where do we go from here? Does the network need the assistance of a black expert to manage more sensitive issues of race during proceedings as opposed to exploitation of the issue of race?’”

However, he does not take the point about black experts any further or consider the points in any depth. I will be going back to psychoanalytic perspectives later in this chapter.

3.7 Further consideration of racism

I have defined racism in chapter 2. Thinking about racism has preoccupied many writers and thinkers across a range of disciplines. It appears never to have gone away and now and again events take place that reminds us that racism is prevalent and alive. Penketh (2014 p 151 -166) discusses the attacks on Islam and the Muslim presence in Britain which she maintains has a gender dimension with a particular focus on the cultural attire worn by Muslim women such as the hijab and niqab. Also the rise of racism in the form of Islamophobia.

I am often instructed to undertake assessments of Muslim families, and I have been informed by some of the families that I assess that they feel that they are being subjected

to racism and Islamophobia. They believe that they have been treated differently because of their religion, colour of skin, race, language and culture. As a result of terror-related offences, some countries have determined how Muslim women, for example, should dress (restrictions on wearing the veil on the face in France and consideration of this in other European countries).

N. Ahmed (2005, p.204) in her study of Tower Hamlets entitled *Insulation in Isolation* recounts stories from the Bangladeshi women she had interviewed. Some of the women were afraid of leaving their homes after hearing that Muslims were being targeted in violent attacks. Some of the women were afraid for their children. Many felt their children should not express their faith through dress that made them more visible. Some of the women were worried about their daughters wearing the hijab and advised their daughters to remove the hijab to “deflect potential abuse”.

There have been other studies such as Brockmann, Butt and Fisher (2001) in a study entitled “The experience of racism: black staff in social services”. This study indicated that racism has been difficult to measure. The definitions emphasised psychological explanations in the past and more recently a greater emphasis on institutional explanations. They also argued that the Macpherson Report (1999) did not lead to an improvement in the viability of studying racism and nor did it help to articulate the relationship between institutional racism and the expression of racism at the personal level.

Although this study was a small-scale qualitative study. It suggested that racism was a universal experience for black and minority ethnic staff. It indicated that there was a resistance to recognising racist and discriminatory practices resulting in underreporting. Also subtle incidents of racism had more of an impact than more explicit racist comments

and practices. It advocated that the best form of action was engaging with staff and managers and convincing them of the necessity of anti-racist strategies by obtaining their willing and informed consent (Dominelli 1997:139).

In respect of Institutional racism, some of the child deaths that have led to enquiries have involved black and ethnic minority children such Victoria Climbié. The Scarman Review (1981) and the Macpherson enquiry (1999) into institutional racism opened up thinking about racism.

Dauids (2011) explores this further in his work. In respect of Victoria Climbié and the Macpherson enquiry. His thoughts are very interesting. He asks the question;

“did public institutions, whose aim is to protect and preserve the life of all, fail in their duty of care to them because they were black? Was racism implicated? “(p207-209).

Fakhry Dauids cites two quotes one from Lord Laming who chaired the official enquiry into Victoria Climbié s death. Institutional racism is highlighted. The first quote states:

“much has been made outside this enquiry of the fact that two black people murdered Victoria and a high proportion of the staff who had contact with her were also black. But to dismiss the possibility of racism on the basis of this superficial analysis of the circumstances is to misunderstand the destructive effect that racism has on our society and its institutions.” (Laming 2003a, p12).

The second quote is from Lord Macpherson states:

“unwitting racism can arise because of lack of understanding, ignorance or mistaken beliefs. It can arise from well-intentioned but patronizing words or actions. It can arise from unfamiliarity with behaviour or cultural traditions of people or families from minority ethnic communities. It can arise from racist stereotypes of black people as potential criminals or troublemakers. He goes on to say “such attitudes can thrive in a tightly knit community so that there can be a collective failure to detect and to outlaw this breed of racism.” (Macpherson,1999a, para 6.17).

Fakhry Davids (2011 p226) goes onto to explore the role of guilt, reparation and repetition in respect of racism. He puts forward the idea that guilt appears to lie at the heart of institutional racism. His evidence for this theory is related to the Lawrence and Climbié cases. He explains:

“observations in these two cases suggest that organizations have an extraordinary capacity to sense unconscious racial guilt in their members and act immediately to close ranks and to cover up the original transgression.” He adds:

“doing something about racial injustice in the world, rather than turning a blind eye to it, does not abolish one’s inner racism, but it does mitigate guilt and allows one to live more easily with it.”

3.8 Psychotherapy / Psychiatric perspectives on racism

There is a body of literature that has indicated that there has been a silence on exploring racism and there is a colour, culture and class blind approach within psychiatry and psychotherapy. The work of Fanon (1967:1970) has been referred to by a number of writers. Katz and Treacher (2005, p50) explain:

“Fanon’s work has been influential in developing an understanding of colonial subjectivity and the endurance of racism.”

Fanon explained how whiteness was internalized and how this impacted on our relationships and perceptions of others and oneself. His work has been referred to by Lowe (2008), Davids (2011) and Dalal (2006).

Lowe in his paper entitled “Colonial Object Relations (2008) explores how colonial object relationships apply to the psychic relationship between black and white people in Britain. He refers to the work of Franz Fanon highlighting the psychic legacy of colonialism where black and white are both part objects which constitutes a destructive type of object relation inherited from the history of slavery, colonization and the empire (2008, p20).

Dauids (2011, p142) referring to Fanon's work praises his contributed to the study of the internal racism. Fanon's contribution is that the black problem was not just in the mind of the black colonial object, but one of individual pathology. Fanon has helped to locate internal racism as something which is a connection between the individual and society.

Michael Rustin (1991) has referred to racism as "an empty category" (Rustin,1991, p98). Michael Rustin explained in The "Good Society and the Inner World that the Nazis compelled Jews to wear the Star of David, because they were not readily identifiable as Jews. Racial differences depended on the definition given to them by the other. He states the emptiness of the category emphasises the irrational foundation of racism. He described racism as similar to a psychotic state of mind. There is a paranoid splitting of objects into the loved and the hated aspect which is then feared and attacked. The recent murder of the MP Jo Cox by Thomas Mair comes to mind. The BBC news on 23 November 2016 reported "Jo Cox: Man jailed for terrorist murder of MP". In this article it was reported that Thomas Mair shouted "Britain first" in the attack. Mr. Justice Wilkie said the murder was carried out to advance a political cause of violent white supremacism, associated with Nazism.

It was also reported in this article that the Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn said Mair had robbed the world of an ambassador of kindness and urged her fellow MPs to confront those who wish to promote the hatred and division that led to her murder.

The Home Secretary Amber Rudd called it a shocking and senseless murder.

She further added:

"as home secretary. I am determined that we challenge extremism in all its forms including the evil of far right extremism and the terrible damage it can cause to individuals, families and communities".

The killing of Jo Cox has made us all think about **the** difference and divisions between groups and racism has been raised again as a live issue.

Dauids (2011) in his model called the internal racist, **has** proposed racist thought is at an unconscious and pre-verbal level. The first step is the difference between ourselves and the racial other. The second is the racial other provides a container in his words:

“where unwanted aspects of the psyche which are split off and projected. The split is a mechanism for protecting the subject from unbearable anxiety.”

The third step is “organising internal template”. The template of inner racism is the feature of the ordinary infantile experience of helplessness and is the feature of the ordinary mind. It is not pathological (p30-31).

Dalal (2002) uses the work of group analyst S.H Foulkes and sociologist Norbert Elias to present a post structuralist understanding of how social groups as well as subsequent power relations between them are established. He compares racism to parasites:

“parasites mutate and evolve to mimic the functioning of the host in order to fool the host into thinking that the parasite is a good and healthy part of itself.”

This leads to the parasite dropping “below the radar” of the defence systems of the host in order to sneak into its body. (2012, p3).

Dalal’s words are important as he states that “celebrating diversity” is “insidious because it fools the host (democratic liberal society) into switching off its immune system, that is the capacity to think (p4). Dalal is basically stating that racism persists and terms such as diversity are a mask that fool people into thinking that racism is being tackled when it is not.

3.9 Social work and racism

As mentioned earlier racism has been a strong theme in the assessments presented by the independent social work experts. Andy and Chris spoke about racism in their personal biographies and professional experiences. The commissioners also spoke about direct and indirect racism, although terms such as diversity and anti discriminatory practice, anti-oppression practice were also used.

Lowe (2014) makes an important point in reference to the Macpherson Report explaining it was:

“critical of race awareness, cultural diversity training, failure to tackle colour blindness, ignorance and the denial of racism in the police force. He discusses the poor reputation of race equality training. He further states the poor reputation of race equality training is due to a number of factors. One of the factors he refers to is a “collusion between commissioners and providers of such training to knowingly settle for superficial training intervention into highly complex and multifaceted problem of racism which is highly resistant to change not only in individuals and organisations, but in society as a whole.” (p15)

The notion of a collusion between the commissioner and the provider as stated by Frank Lowe has some parallels with this study. Currently in social work and other areas there appears to be a greater emphasis on diversity issues and less emphasis on anti-racist practice. Diversity is often referred to and not racism. Lowe (2014, p24) highlights the difficulties in talking and thinking about diversity.

Gurnam Singh (2014, p29) states:

“as long as there is racism, there will be a need for anti-racism. What form this will take depends largely on the way racism reproduces itself, what new antagonisms surface, who loses and who benefits.”

In this study it appears that anti-racist social work practice has at times been difficult to talk about. It appears that tokenistic gestures have been made to try to address racism.

For example, the commissioner may seek the appointment of an

independent social work expert to address race, culture, language issues so that the parents and other parties and the court family cannot say that this aspect has not been taken into account. Sometimes the wrong experts may be appointed. Andy for example was unable to speak the same language as the parents he was assessing and sometimes an interpreter was not used. It appears sometimes the **correct** thought is not given to appoint the right expert. This may result in repetitive assessments. This appeared to happen in the assessment presented by Eve. Prior to her appointment there had been a number of previous assessments. The tokenistic approach can lead to the wrong decisions being made and the wrong outcomes for the parents and children. It can also lead to highly conflictual situations if the independent social work expert comes out with a different outcome to that of the commissioner in particular. This may ultimately result in the wrong outcome for the parents and child(ren). Chris described the conflicts he had faced with the Children's Guardian. The Children Guardian's lack of faith in Chris's assessment led to the appointment of a further expert who came out with the same conclusion as Chris.

3.10 Anti-racist social work practice

Gurnam Singh (2014, p.29) highlights:

"as long as there is racism there will be a need for anti-racism".

Harrison and Burke (2014 p75) make the point:

"anti-racist social work practice was one direct response to acknowledging the impact of race and racism on the lives of those affected by racism.".

This included establishing black worker's groups and the development of black perspectives. Also the provision of services and social work with black children and families (Barn 1993). They further comment (p76):

“being critical of anti-racist practice does not mean that racism is a thing of the past as this is definitely not the case”.

I would agree with their comment and the evidence of race crime following Brexit has been reported in the media. Matthew Weaver (2016) reported in the Guardian Newspaper on 28th September:

“a horrible spike in hate crime after Britain’s vote to leave the European Union was at least partly linked to the referendum. Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe the Metropolitan Police commissioner told a hearing at London’s City Hall that hate crime was showing signs of decreasing after a sharp rise in June and July. Figures from the National Police Chief’s Council showed a 49 per cent rise in hate crime incidents to 1863 in the last week in July in England, Wales and Northern Ireland compared with the previous year. A survey by the Guardian found that European Embassies in Britain have logged dozens of incidents of suspected hate crime and abuse against their citizens since the referendum.”

Penketh (2014 p151) discusses the right of Muslim women to wear the Hijab. She has listened to the voices of Muslim women in respect of their perspectives on Islamophobia and racism in modern Britain. She has provided many examples of discrimination associated with developments since 9/11(p158 to164). She mentions that Muslim women have been called “Osama bin Laden”, “Paki” and “terrorist”. Her study had included comments made by journalists and politicians. (p153).

3.11 The history of anti-racist social work.

The work of Fanon (1967) has also been important within social work as there is a strong influence from earlier parts of British history (the colonial past). This has influenced the approach to working with black and ethnic minority families. There has also been the impact of racism and immigration policies. The early work of Ahmad, Cheetham and Small (1985) highlights this.

I would like to consider how anti-racist social work practice came into being in the first place. The work of writers such Sivanandan (1990), Gilroy (1987) amongst others refer

to the movements against racism in the 1970s and early 1980s. These movements appear to be influenced by inner city uprisings in various parts of Britain in 1981, particularly in Bristol, Brixton, Chapeltown and Handsworth. Anti-racist thinking did not just focus on individual prejudice, but also about discussions and thinking in respect of structural and institutional racism.

There was concrete evidence that Black people were living in poor housing, experienced poor health, lack of opportunities in education, black children in the care system (removed from their parents). Sociologists such as Solomos (1988) and Hiro (1992), Sivanandan (1982), Fryer (1984) advocated that racism existed and it was embedded within society.

The Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW for short) had pressure placed on it to incorporate anti-racist learning requirements into the Diploma in Social Work. This was in part due to the under representation of black professionals and service users in social work agencies and the needs of black services users being ignored in the social services agencies. In 1989 CCETSW introduced Rules and Regulations for the Diploma in Social Work (Paper 30) which made it a compulsory requirement for social work students to address race and racism. The aim was also for social workers to be aware of the structural and institutional nature of racism in Britain and **how to** support service users affected by discrimination. CCETSW's anti-racist policy stated:

“racism is endemic in the values and attitudes and structures of British society including that of social services and social work education.”

CCETSW recognised that the effects of racism on black people are incompatible with the values of social work and therefore sought to combat racist practices in all areas of its responsibilities (CCETSW 1991:6).

The Diploma in Social Work stipulated learning requirements such as recognising the implications of political, economic, racial, social and cultural factors upon service delivery. Also the development of awareness of the inter-relationship of the processes of structural oppression, race, class and gender.

However, this was undermined by a denial of the structural and institutional nature of racism. This was supported by politicians and the attack on social work was from within the profession and from politicians and media, and this led to moves to undermine anti-racist practice. CCETSW Chair Jeffrey Greenwood ordered a review of anti-discriminatory policies, and as a result the formal commitment to anti-racism was dropped.

There is evidence from this study to support the more generalised positions quoted. This may point to the importance of a commitment to anti-racist social work. The rise in hate crime since Brexit indicates the importance of anti-racist social work. Fekete (2014, p.48-49) discusses the growth of xeno-racism and Islamophobia in Britain. She also discusses the changes in legislation, policies and practices that impact on asylum seekers, Roma, BME youth and Muslims. She highlights the importance of social workers understanding the dynamics of different racisms, against asylum seekers, BME and Muslim youth, cultural stereotypes and institutional racism which is embedded in policies and practice. Penketh (2014, p165-166) urges the importance of social workers having a critical understanding of the impact of Islamophobia. How Islamophobia can lead to discriminatory, oppressive policies and practices. Also how this may negatively impact on the lives of British Muslim communities. She also highlights the impact of poverty, disadvantage and inequality.

I would like to mention radical social work and anti-oppressive practice as this gives a framework for assessment and intervention in social work. It appears that the independent social work experts have incorporated this way of working into their practice.

Thompson (2000) makes reference to radical social work as a movement in the 1960s and 1970s that raised awareness of the significance of poverty **and** deprivation. **It developed** an awareness of and emphasis upon, inequalities based on gender, race **and/ or** ethnicity. Okitikpi and Aymer (2010, p57) further state in the 1970s and 1980s, radical social work incorporated community work into the professional. There was a political edge to the work.

Harrison and Burke (2014, p79) have defined anti-oppressive practice as a radical social work approach. It is an approach that takes account of the differences and strengthens of communities and individuals. The diversity of how families and individuals operate are taken into account. They recognize the social and political contexts to the work.

In current social work practice there is a move to consider diversity and considering cultural competencies as a means of working with minority communities. There have been several pieces of important research that have highlighted the overrepresentation of black children in the care system. Barn (1993) raised the significance of race and racism in the decisions made by social workers in the care careers of black children. Other studies have found the overrepresentation of black children in the public care system and the lack of appropriate preventative support services Rowe (1989) and MacDonald (1992).

All these studies point to the importance of **undertaking** sound objective and clear assessments of parents and children. **Otherwise** the wrong decisions and outcomes can

occur that will have a grave consequence, such as removal of children from parents or leaving children with parents **where** there are risks.

I will now move to discuss the four areas that I have referred to earlier in this chapter and chapter 1. I have broken these down into simple headings.

3.13 Assessments.

To recap the assessments that have been discussed in this study have particular features. The parents and children are black/ethnic minority families where there **are** some complex issues to think about such as race, religion, language, immigration, housing and poverty. In addition to this there are concerns around abuse, and or neglect towards their child(ren). The issues around their ability to parent have made the assessments challenging and difficult at times. Anxiety and conflict have featured in all the assessments.

I have already discussed some literature that tackles anti-racist social work practice, radical social work and anti-oppressive practice. There is a great deal of literature in respect of undertaking assessments and tools for assessment and assessment frameworks. I refer to Calder and Hackett (2003).

The literature and framework tools are very clear as to what areas social work assessments should cover. However, from the assessments presented in this research there are a number of other factors that come into play that are both conscious and unconscious. In respect of thinking about race and culture, there has been criticism in the child abuse enquiries that a focus on race and culture has resulted in abuse being missed and children being killed. This is why it is crucial that the assessments are conducted in

a measured and objective manner so that there is a balanced assessment. This study shows that this **is not an easy task**.

3.14 Use of frameworks.

All the independent social work experts in this study appear to have a framework that they are using. Andy has stated that he has used the Children's Act 1989, s (1)(3) welfare check list which includes looking at race, religion and culture as his starting point. Chris, Eve and Ivy have incorporated a wider framework of analysis which considers not just the welfare check list, but incorporates an insight as to the impact of the parent's background, religion, heritage, perceptions of parenting and an insight into their own experiences of being parented.

3.15 Points to include in anti-discriminatory/anti-racist framework.

I would like to consider some specific literature that gives some pointers as to what should be included in assessments from anti-discriminatory and or anti-racist framework.

Okitikpi and Aymer (2010, p105) refer to the work of Rees (1991) which argues: "social work assessments are not value free and as such it is inevitable that practitioners will be influenced in how they gather information. The situation is even more acute with regard to risk assessment."

All the participants of this research have spoken about their anxieties, beliefs and influences. It has been apparent that their relationships with their primary carers/birth parents and life experiences has had an influence on how an assessment is approached and thought about. This is discussed further in the chapter 6 The Biographical Connection.

The second point made by National Research Council (1983, in Adams, 1995:45) referred to by Okitiki and Aymer (2010, p105-106) is:

“gaps in information must be bridged by inference and belief, and these cannot be evaluated in the same way as facts.”

This point is very important as it may be the inferences and beliefs that make a difference in the analysis and outcome of the assessment. It can also affect the outcome as to whether the child is removed or returned to his or her parent. In this study the biographical connection has emerged as an important factor to think about.

The Literature Review indicates that there are some important ideas that are important to think about when undertaking assessments. I have broken these down into headings. I will be considering the clean slate approach, the rule of optimism, colour blind approach and the meaning of the child.

3.16 The Clean Slate Approach.

Parker and Bradley (2003) refer to the clean state. It means that assessors may attempt, or believe it is possible to start off with a clean slate and not be influenced by what has happened in the past. However, with this approach vital information from the past may be ignored. This is why chronologies, family histories and genograms are important ways of gathering information. In the case presented by Eve, the commissioner Jane felt that Eve had missed out some of the earlier information in the case particularly the abuse the mother had suffered in Vietnam. This led to Jane believing that due to the previous abuse in her life, the mother was unable to form warm and nurturing relationships. However, Eve explained that she assessed the mother to be warm and was able to be emotionally available to the children and she spoke about how she assessed emotional warmth. Although, it appeared that Eve might have been applying a clean slate approach, on

further exploration it was clear that she had thought about and she had integrated the mother's previous child hood and life experience to the parenting of the children at the centre of the assessment.

This was also applied to Chris where the original Children's Guardian felt that he was not evaluating the risk to a female child of being parented by a father where serious allegations had been made about domestic violence. However, Chris had thought about this, and his assessment was that the birth mother was a damaged parent. His assessment revealed many positives in the father. This was eventually accepted by the court and the other parties. Although he had been asked to repeat the assessment a number of times and this would have incurred considerable costs to the public purse.

Okitikpi and Aymer (2010, p106) argue the one of the concerns of the clean slate approach is that it leads to paralysis in certain situations. Especially when thinking about cultural and familial practices. They also make the important point that sometimes social workers have to go against their "gut feelings in an effort not to appear oppressive or discriminatory." They refer to the child abuse enquiries as examples. If a practitioner treads too carefully not wanting to upset or censor a parent and/ or children that are being assessed. They state this is not good practice and it has in their words:

"sapped the confidence of the profession and its practitioners." (p106).

There is an argument that too much focus on race has resulted in abuse being missed. This is something to think about this in this study. However, the anxiety about thinking about factors such as race, racism and other structural factors may also result in punitive decisions such as children being removed and parents being subject to harsher assessments and made to climb further hurdles and hoops. As stated Chris speaks about

how he was repeatedly asked to repeat his assessment, and how he repeatedly wrote the same recommendations and conclusions in his reports. A further expensive assessment by another expert was commissioned to counter his assessment. Chris, an experienced independent social work expert, was able to assess the risk and a consensus was reached that the child is placed with her father. However, as a Black professional, his professionalism and expertise were questioned.

3.17 The Rule of Optimism

Dingwall, Eeklaar and Murray (1983) coined this term. It means practitioners think the best of parents and as a result do not intervene and overlook the abuse that is taking place.

Okitikpi and Aymer (2010, p107) discuss the application of the Rule of Optimism to anti-discriminatory practice. They are very clear that judgements can be made regarding behaviours, attitudes and if there are clear boundaries regarding acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Anti-discriminatory practice is not just about external factors such as housing, poverty, class, etc. but also conscious and unconscious processes. They propose a holistic framework of assessment which integrates external and internal factors.

3.18 The Colour Blind Approach.

The Colour Blind approach refers to the principle of treating everyone the same way regardless of race, culture, religion, skin colour. Macdonald (1991, p69) argues:

“colour blindness results in attempts to make black children and adults fit into service provision”.

Ahmed, Cheetham and Small (1986, p8) raise in respect of assessing child (ren):

“many white people find it distasteful to make racial and ethnic distinctions between children.” It also means “treating everyone the same is the failure to provide information about social services and social work in minority languages, to have poor interpreting services”.

I have already referred to literature and will mention further literature and research from professionals from social work and therapeutic, psychoanalytical and systemic work that have considered ways of assessing and working with black and ethnic minority families. These studies have advocated a move away from the colour blind approach. Some important thinking has emerged in respect of assessing black and ethnic minority families which indicates that practitioners from black and ethnic minority communities should be used to undertake assessments.

Some writers and practitioners have evaluated their own work with black and ethnic minority families and set out guidelines. Some authors have written about practical ways of assessing black and ethnic minority families. The aim of the work is to promote thought and insight into this complex work. For example, Begum (1995, p.163) points out the common pitfalls and strategies she uses in cross-cultural assessments. Lau (1996, p.169) outlines guidelines for family assessments. She highlights examining belief systems and values (including religion), structures relevant to authority and decision making. She asks about stage-specific developmental tasks at different life-cycle stages for this family. She suggests that family rituals are examined, and support networks examined. She asks about the stresses and losses arising from the family's experience. She also explores the therapeutic interventions required to engage the authority structure in the family and whether this is congruent with the family's world view.

Ahmed (1990) identifies a checklist for assessment, how to empower black families, she examines resources for change, and she examines social work legislation. Bhugra (2004, p.227-246) has produced a useful check list, questionnaire to use called the

Culture and Identity Schedule. This has been helpful in assessing the extent to which Asians identify with the British cultural environment or retain, (re)create or adapt their cultural signifiers.

3.19 The Meaning of the Child.

Finally, within this section, I would like to consider the meaning of the child. This is a term coined by Reder and Duncan (1993). This study reanalysed thirty-five public enquiries in respect of child abuse cases. They looked at the family history and chronology of each case. They found that some children had a special significance to their parents and were at greater risk of harm than other children in the household or in the family. In terms of assessments the importance of understanding the psychological meaning of children was considered to be very important. I would take this a step further by suggesting that the impact of the assessor's own parenting and the meaning for them to be a child within their family may have an unconscious influence on how they view the child at the centre of the assessment. This has come up a number of times in this study. I would say all the independent social work experts made some connection with the child that they were assessing and the relationship they had with one or other of their parents. I suspect this was probably why they presented the assessment, although at the time of the initial presentation they were not fully aware of why they were presenting the assessment that they presented. This is discussed further in the chapter 6 **and 7**.

3.20 Conflict.

The next area I want to discuss is the role of conflict and anxiety and an exploration of conscious and unconscious processes and the role of the relationship between the researcher and research subject making use of transference and countertransference.

In each assessment presented and the relationships between the independent social work expert, commissioner and parent there is some form of conflict, so I believe it is important to think about what is meant by conflict. Hanaway (2012, p.9) states,

“conflict appears to occur when arguments, disagreements, competition or equalities threaten something that is important to us. This can be something which is external or internal.”

She explains the reactions that occur in the body. She refers to the “amygdala hijack” (p10). This is when the emotional part overrides the thinking part and it may take some hours to clear the system. I think it is very important to understand how conflict affects the individual and in this research how conflict has impacted on the participants of this research, and myself as the researcher. Strasser and Randolph (2014) explain understanding emotions, value and belief systems, coping strategies and factors influencing self-esteem are very important in conflictual situations. In the interviews with the participants, this helped me to listen to them and to be aware of the impact of the conflict on them. Chris has described the impact of the conflict on him where he had violent thoughts towards the Children's Guardian. Ivy was upset that she had been treated as a support worker when she went for a meeting with the social worker and feeling undermined by this worker within minutes of meeting him. Eve and Jane found it difficult to speak to each other after the proceedings were concluded, despite attending the same support group in the past.

3.21 Anxiety

Anxiety has emerged as an integral aspect of the data and findings of this study. It is therefore important to unravel the meaning of anxiety. For this, I feel it is helpful to examine the psychoanalytical research and literature on the meaning of anxiety.

Anxiety operates at an individual and an organisational level.

3.22 The impact of anxiety on the individual.

Freud (1924) stated if anxiety overwhelms an individual's sense of reality in an enduring way, then a psychological disturbance may result. All the participants of the research have exhibited some form of anxiety. As the researcher, I have picked up on this anxiety and there have been times when I also have felt anxious about the material that has been discussed. I have tried to make sense of the material in discussions with my supervisors and the impact of the material on me as the researcher. This is discussed further when considering transference and countertransference and the Biographical connection.

Ruch (2010, p30) states one of the reasons to understand the management and response of anxiety and powerful feelings is that the response can take a number of forms such as aggression, hysteria, manic behaviour, blame and depression. The interviews with all the participants have revealed their response to anxiety. As stated as a researcher listening to the material presented did make me feel anxious at times. For example, it was painful listening to Chris's experiences of witnessing his mother being verbally abused by some men. I was moved when Eve informed me of an event that she had never spoken about before when she was a child.

Ruch (2010 p,30) highlights the importance of understanding the response to anxiety in distressing and uncertain situations. There is a connection between an infant managing anxiety as an infant/child and managing anxiety as an adult. For this process the relationship between the primary carer and child is very important. This relationship is crucial in equipping the child/infant to develop the means to manage anxiety. Bion (1962) calls this the "nameless dread". Klein (1946) puts forward that the baby/infant experiences intense feelings of love and hate. The careful management of these polarised feelings and help from the parent reduces the anxiety in the infant/child. This is

the move from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position where links and thinking can occur and this reduces anxiety. The work Howe (1995) is also important. There is a link between the infant developing integrated emotional responses and how these influence their responses as adults. This is something very important to think about in evaluating the response of the independent social work experts in particular to the anxiety created by the material in the assessments that they present.

3.23 The attachment theory perspective on anxiety.

The work of Shemmings and Shemmings (2011, p27) is important. They refer to the work of Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980). Bowlby drew attention to attachment between mother and infant/child. The attachment system between infant/child and the attachment figure (the primary carer often seen to be the mother but also includes fathers) initially serves to protect the children from a danger, fear and threat. This will later form a secure base so that the infant/child can explore the environment. They also identify certain behaviours such as crying, referred to as “attachment behaviours” which are aimed at increasing proximity or closeness to the attachment figure. These are unconsciously selected by the infant/child if they cannot get the attachment figure’s attention.

Shemmings and Shemmings (2011, p.20) also refer to Craik (1943) due to their early experiences the infant/child develops “internal working models.” They develop this by referring to the work of Bretherton and Mulholland (1999) (p20) stating:

“persistently rejecting, hostile, disconnected or frightening attachment figures can lead to the development of an internal working model based on the expectation that others are similarly unavailable or unpredictable or the self-deep at its core is unlovable.”

This can lead a child to avoid others, attack others or deceive others when they are distressed. The research also points to the power of anxiety and how it can act as a block

to thinking. I would now like to think about how anxiety can be a block to thinking for the practitioner, but also for the parent and child that is being assessed.

3.24 Anxiety can block thinking and reflection.

I turn to psychoanalytical research to offer some assistance. Firstly, Klein (1935,1946) refers to two forms of thinking; the paranoid-schizoid and depressive. The paranoid-schizoid is when a person defends themselves from painful thoughts by splitting them into good and bad. They will project into others those feelings that they cannot bear. The depressive is the process whereby the individual can integrate feelings and can see both themselves and the other as more integrated with good and bad aspects. Klein was clear that an individual will oscillate between the depressive and paranoid-schizoid throughout their life and are more likely to be paranoid-schizoid when they are anxious or stressed.

It is important to discuss how these anxious feelings can be contained and managed. To assist in understanding this area, it is important to consider some of the research in understandings the infant's relationship with their primary figure (often viewed as the mother in earlier research). This is important as the notion of the containment originates from the infant's relationship with their primary carer. Freud (1917), Bion (1967), Alvarez (1998), and Klein (1946), amongst others have been important in understanding the relationship between the baby/infant and the mother. This research is also important in understanding how thinking has developed. Before I do this it is important to understand some key concepts that are referred to. Douglas

(2007, p24-44) has written about Containment and Reciprocity. She states,

“Bion developed the concept of containment but did not define it”. (p24).

She goes back to the genesis of containment exploring the work of Freud (1917/1991), Klein (1946), Bion (1959,1962,1993). She considers the contemporary use of containment examining Garland (1998) and Anderson (1998). She also considers Bick (1968).

3.25 Projection and projective identification

Firstly, Freud (1917/1991, p241) developed the concept of projection which for him meant:

“an expulsion from within oneself of whatever, becomes a source of pleasure.” Douglas

(2007, p25) defines projection as when:

“a person externalises his emotion in someone as a way of not accepting it in him/herself. For instance, might then externalise his anger in others, seeing them as angry.”

Klein developed Freud’s thinking (1946/1999, p.8) with her theories of projective identification stating:

“much of the hatred against parts of the self is now directed towards the mother. This leads to a particular form of identification which established the prototype of the term projective identification. I suggest for these processes the term “projective identification.”

Bion (1959/1993, p.106) further developed projective identification by stating that projective identification may be a way of communicating difficult or painful feelings. For example, a mother may project her feelings of being unloved by her baby and then identify the baby as unlovable. Bion further explains:

"Projective identification makes it possible for him to investigate his feelings in a personality powerful enough to contain them." (Bion 1959/1993.p106).

3.26 Containment.

I refer to the work of Douglas (2007, p.33) containment is defined as:

“when one person receives and understands the emotional communication of another without being overwhelmed by it, processes it and then communicates understanding and recognition back to the other person. This process can restore the capacity to think in the other person.”

In this process referring to the work of Bion (1959/1993, p104). Douglas helps us understand containment by highlighting the importance of the relationship between the infant/child and mother (primary carer **can also be the father**). The mother is able to experience the infant's dread by the means of projective identification and retain a balanced outlook. (p27). She also refers to Garland (1998, p.109) adding when the mother (primary carer **can also be the father**) is able to manage the fears of the baby/infant by the use of language, tone of voice, holding eye contact the baby/infant experiences some relief.

3.27 Anxiety in organisations with a focus on child protection work.

Now moving onto thinking about anxiety in organisations. This is important as the commissioners are a part of an organisation and represent the organisation (Local Authorities and Children and Family Court Advisory Service) that they work for. The outcome of the assessments is considered by the Judiciary who are employed by the Ministry of Justice. It is important for this study to understand the impact of anxiety on the organisation.

The work of Klein (1935,1946) has been very important in trying to make sense of how anxiety is managed in organisations. Bion (1961), Jacques (1957) and Menzies-Lyth (1960) have developed Klein's theories and applied them to organisations. Organisations like individuals move between the paranoid-schizoid and depressive position. Jacques (1957) highlights how institutions are used by members to defend against paranoid anxieties.

Obholzer (1994) reminds us similar to individual's groups also have an unconscious life. The consideration of unconscious process in a group is important.

Menzies-Lyth (1988, p.73) explores how nurses manage anxiety working in a hospital. The nurses developed deeply unconscious anxieties which they needed to defend against. As a result, the Social Defence System was considered. If there was a discrepancy between the individual defences of the nurses and the organization (the hospital) it would lead to a breakdown in the relationship between the individual nurse and the hospital (the institution).

The notion of organization containment is important. Foster (2017, p27) refers to organisational containment. She refers to Bion and Menzies-Lyth's research. She raises the role of subgroups in organisations.

Bower (2005, p.13) refers to working in a hostile climate. She states:

"much of turbulence in social work today comes from organisational settings of the work."

There is less time for workers to form attachments with their colleagues and a climate where social workers, in particular, have to work differently to create their own external and internal support systems. She mentions the importance of psychoanalytic understanding as an immensely powerful internal resource. These issues or difficulties can result in a lack of confidence. Interestingly Judy Foster (2017, p 1-2) talks about her choice of social work as a profession, but did not realize over 40 years of her career she would see a profession blamed and battered by the media and others.

Cooper (2010, p231) importantly identifies in child protection social work (which includes children subject to court proceedings). In **his** words:

"unthinkable anxieties about child torture and murder at the heart of the child safeguarding task."

He also argues that there are macro social forces at play. He refers to the work of Tony McCaffrey which describes the evolution of public sector anxieties. The anxieties are at a number of levels. The pressures on senior and middle managers in their effort to manage the demands of cost, competition, performance and partnership. This leaves frontline staff isolated in their struggle with the face to face task. (p237-239).

It is clear from the literature referred to such as Bower (2004), Foster (2017) and Cooper (2006) that there is a wider political context that is contributing to anxiety within organisations which also impacts on individuals, parents and practitioners. Cooper (1996) has argued that anxieties of children dying have been a driving force behind child social policy and practice. However, Cooper (2005:2) also argues that child death is extremely interactive, complex and multi-faceted.

The anxiety of the work may prompt workers to behave in ways that are not typical for them. I have already discussed important considerations such as the rule of optimism, colour blinded approach, clean slate approach and the meaning of the child in the family. It is important to be aware of these points when undertaking assessments. It appears an integrated approach is very important to bring all these factors together. This leads to a discussion of the literature in respect of the fourth category.

3.28 The importance of supervision and reflection to good practice.

I have discussed the importance of restoring the ability to think for the individual and the organisation. A number of authors have discussed the importance of being able to step back to think and reflect. They have linked this to the importance of supervision. In order for this to happen it is important that there is containment. In addition to this emotional regulation has been discussed as being relevant to the notion of containment.

Shemmings and Shemmings (2011, p.32) refer to the work of Feeney and Noller, (1996, p.37) in explaining how emotional regulation develops in the way early caregivers respond to an infant's distress signals. This leads to different learned and internalised strategies to organise emotional experience and to deal with primarily negative feelings. Emotional states can be moderated with the help of others through empathy, support and humour.

Okitikpi and Aymer (2008, p25) refer to emotional intelligence. They state,

“the art of social work practice is to use ideas to help them to reflect on these relationships, to learn from them and to develop their emotional resilience and their emotional intelligence.”

I will now move to discuss how the above material can be used to help practitioners to think and reflect. A number of writers and researchers have examined the complexity of the work and the impact of the work on the practitioner and the importance of reflection of practice and self-reflection.

Okitikpi and Aymer (2008, p25) highlight the importance of theoretical frameworks that can help practitioners make sense of their work and help in the supervisory process. The supervision session with the worker is compared to the relationship between the mother and her infant/child. The supervision session can offer containment.

There are a number of others working in the field and they have explained how they have integrated an understanding of working cross culturally and using an anti-discriminatory/anti-oppressive framework in their work. I have already mentioned the work of Abbas (2004); Cooper (2005); Lowe (2014), Brooks (2005), Fonagy (1991); Foster (2017); Ruch (2007;2010), Davids (2011) Dalal (2006), Penketh (2014), Lavalette (2014) and Singh (2014).

Krause (2002, p68) refers to the Macpherson Report into the Stephen Lawrence enquiry. (Macpherson 1999). She highlights:

"cross-cultural therapeutic work does not only present a learning opportunity but a very personal challenges to beliefs and stereotypes."

Anane-Agyei (2002, p80) in her work with the African Families Project states:

"we found it is imperative to create space in which to explore the impact of these forces (the emotional intensity of the work that we do and the history of the relationships between white and African peoples) on our relationships and how our relationships affect the work that we do with children and their families)."

Another important point to consider in evaluating one's ability to step back and reflect and think is how the use of the self is incorporated in undertaking an assessment. From this research it is apparent that the independent social work expert has made use of the self in undertaking the assessments. This has been examined further in the chapter Biographical connection.

Ward (2010, p46 -65) discusses the use of the self in some detail. He refers to the worker's own personal history, areas of conflict **and** decisions for going into social work. He highlights there may be an unconscious or conscious need to:

"fulfil certain expectations at an unreasonable cost to ourselves or those close to us". He further argues "we all have our weaknesses, blind spots and areas that we may find too difficult or threatening to contemplate and likely to avoid sometimes unconsciously."(p50).

He further argues referring to Cooper (2005) that it is important to acknowledge these difficulties and to find a way to process them so that:

"they do not seriously distort our view of the world. If these are kept hidden or a secret it may mean, we operate similar blind spots or areas of denial in our practice."

He further talks about bringing to the conscious material that is within the unconscious. It is very apparent from the interviews with the independent social work experts in particular that blind spots were spotted and unconscious material was brought to the conscious. Eve remembered an experience when she was a child where she acted as a buffer between her parents. She later spoke about her expectations of men as a result of her parent's relationship and her

experiences of her father. Chris spoke about finding his father, and how this influenced the assessment of the father he was assessing. In that he appreciated the father he was assessing wanted to parent, whereas his father did not want to know him.

This has been an important aspect of this research as the use of transference and countertransference in helping to understand what is going on beneath the surface has been very important. I would now like to discuss the importance of supervision and reflection and the ability to step back and reflect.

3.29 Importance of supervision and reflection.

All the social work experts were able to recognise the importance of stepping back and being able to reflect on their work. This is clearly a very important and a vital component of social work practice and engagement. This has been thought about by most of the authors I have mentioned. In respect of court based assessments. Judith Freeman (2005, p.116) emphasizes how her team in undertaking expert assessments try to hold the third position and offer containment to the parents. Rabia Malik and Philippe Mandin (2002) in their court based assessment work also spoke about trying to hold the third position as systemic therapists. At each stage, they reflected and thought about their positions and took note of small details and how this impacted and influenced their assessment. They also thought about the impact of the work on themselves.

3.30 Mentalisation and the application of anti-oppressive and anti -racist practice.

Mentalisation is considered to be important. John Simmonds (2010, p.228) applies the concept to supervision. He states:

“developing supervisory practice enables social workers to learn and develop their professional knowledge and skills and apply these in a thoughtful and relevant way means creating the kinds of space where reflecting on the powerful emotional feelings stirred up in both the work and in the process of discussing the work is possible.”

I would like to move to think about the application of anti-racist practice and anti discriminatory practice and the how this may promote the ability to think and reflect. Again the work of Okitikpi and Aymer has been important (2010, p 30-38). They explain reflection and thinking is an important part of anti-discriminatory practice. They refer to radical politics as there is a political aspect to anti-discriminatory practice. (p38).

Okitikpi and Aymer (2010) highlight how anti-discriminatory practice involves the ability to reflect and think about one's practice. It is an active, continuous process of being challenged about one's perception and assumptions and reflecting on one's practice.

Harrison and Burke (2014, p.81) mention;

“reflexivity as a principle in anti-oppressive practice requires the practitioner and the service user to engage in critical reflection”. They further add “the act of critical reflexivity will bring them nearer to a more complex appreciation of the other person’s social and cultural identities.”

Finally, I would like to refer to Sylvia Smith (2014, p.170 to p.173) PHD thesis. She examines the importance of containment and offering a space for reflection. Although her study focuses on front line managers, it is my assessment the principles she outlines are applicable to independent social worker experts and commissioners. She summarises the sources of anxiety and pressures as projective spaghetti junction (appendix figures 6.1 to **6.4**). This links the internal with the external (professional, unconscious and personal self) in examining the impact of race and ethnicity and management of managing and accessing service users. Her message in respect of the tensions and difficulties around openly discussing and speaking about race and discrimination can potentially place a child at risk is very relevant to this study.

3.31 Summary and conclusions.

In this chapter, I have explored how racism has been a common theme and the importance of anti-racist social work. Racism has been discussed in the assessments presented by the

independent social work experts. I have discussed the meaning of assessments in social work, and some of the blocks that may occur when undertaking assessments. Since the assessments have involved child protection and risk assessments involving children. The mention of racism and risks to children which may require removal from parents can provoke anxiety at an individual and organisational level. It was important to think about anxiety and the blocks to thinking and how these blocks may be overcome. This leads to the importance of reflective practice, the use of the self and finding a space for reflection and for thinking.

One of the elements that appear central is the understanding of oneself. **Also of our** early experiences and how this impacts on our work and the importance of trying to think about this within supervision and the reflective space. This helps in maintaining the third position and becoming aware of and understanding our blind spots. I discuss this further in chapter **7 and 8** of this study.

4.Chapter 4 Methodology (Data collection)

4.1 Introduction

In chapter 2, I presented the case studies. In chapter 3, I explored some of the literature on the important terms, concepts and ideas that have informed this research and have influenced how I make sense of the data. In this chapter, I turn to methodological considerations.

The question that I pose is if I am concerned with how anxieties around assessments involving race, culture, religion and language are delegated to expert independent social workers, how might I go about researching such a phenomenon? What sorts of considerations and principles might guide my choices and actions about how to approach and engage with this task? Here is where I give some consideration to the philosophical underpinnings of the research. This chapter, therefore, considers some of the ontological, epistemological and ethical issues, as well as more practical matters about how to approach this research question, along with an illustration of how I went about collecting the data from and through my interviews with one client. I have given the example of interviewing Chris, an independent social work expert, to illustrate the complexities around data collection and the dynamic process between the researcher and the participants of the research.

This chapter is divided into five sections. Firstly, I will be examining why I have used qualitative as opposed to quantitative research methods. I will also explain the importance of establishing a reliable qualitative research model to ensure that the study is valid and reliable and the ethical considerations. Secondly, I would like to discuss the actual meaning of psycho-social research and the practical task of collecting the data. Thirdly, I will be looking at some theory by way of background and **the** context to understanding the methodology used. Fourthly, I will be considering data collection. I will move onto the development of the questions and analysing the

data. Fifthly, I will be considering transference and countertransference. I have given the example of the case of Chris independent social work expert to illustrate the complexities around data collection and the dynamic process between the researcher and the participant of the research. The FANI has allowed me to examine the conscious and unconscious and the complexities of the research subjects.

4.2 Qualitative versus Quantitative.

Due to the kind of material, I am researching which thinks about the conscious and unconscious, anxiety and defences against anxiety. It is important to have a research method that is considered reliable, so that the information produced from the research is valid and reliable.

Ontology refers to what is? In the context of this research, the question is, according to this study, what is there to research or know? Epistemology refers to issues to do with what can be known, and how such claims to knowledge might be supported, justified or otherwise legitimised. So how can we know or explore what there is to know or explore? Ethics refers to how we treat people, so in the context of this study, ethical considerations are mainly to do with how the participants are treated.

In this study, I am concerned with feelings, responses, anxieties and defences against anxieties, psychic pain, reasons, opinions and motives. That these states are, and can be known or studied are the crucial ontological and epistemological assumptions made in this study. How might I go about studying these states of persons? A decision that needs to be made is whether such states should be approached through quantitative or qualitative research. Traditionally, due to **extensive use quantitative research was viewed as a hard science**, and its concern with cause and effect, prediction, repeatability and generalisability, quantitative research was regarded as more valid and reliable than qualitative research, as the latter was concerned with

understanding and exploring rather than explaining and predicting. This would imply that it is a more valid and robust research method and the results of the research study would be more valid and reliable. This is particularly important when as social workers are increasingly called upon to produce engage in evidence based practice (EBP) in order to meet regulatory audits and inspections (Briggs, 1995). Researching emotions and the conscious and unconscious can be viewed with some with scepticism. Fuller and Petch (1995) as cited in Briggs (1995) have challenged this, and there has been a shift towards appreciating the value of understanding and exploring a phenomenon in depth, I also refer to the work of Stake (2006).

I have chosen a qualitative as opposed to quantitative research method because it produces rich data which is detailed, and from multiple perspectives and full of meanings and significance, Silverman (2000). This is particularly important as I am aiming to understand the depth of experiences of the independent social work experts, parent and commissioners. I **listened** to the narratives and as a person in the room with participants, also qualitative data seeks the meaning behind social interaction, I also refer to the work of Patton (1990).

As I have indicated above, there are significant differences between qualitative and quantitative research. Stake (1995, p.37) highlights, firstly, there is a distinction between the explanation, understanding and the quantitative of the purpose of the inquiry. Secondly, quantitative researchers press for explanation and control. Georg Henrik von Wright (1971) stated in 'Explanation and Understanding', qualitative research tries to establish an empathetic understanding through descriptions. This will convey the experience to the reader. Quantitative research methods have grown out of the scientific search for cause and effect, expressed in grand theory where researchers regularly treat the uniqueness of cases as 'errors' and outside the system of explained science. Stake (1995, p 39) on the other explains that qualitative researchers consider the:

“the uniqueness of individual cases and contexts as important to understanding.”

Referring to the work of Crotty (1988, p.67), qualitative research will allow me to seek an explanation and an understanding of social phenomena. This allows individuals to make sense of their social worlds, and to see knowledge as historically and culturally situated. Miles and Huberman (1994), highlight there are no clearly defined rules about sample size.

The sample sizes are smaller and are studied in more detail and depth. Qualitative research gives an account of peoples' "lived experience". It has allowed me to explore and try to gain some understanding of what is likely to be left out of what people say or are unable to say, or at least might find difficult to say, and that includes myself as the researcher.

So far, I have made a case for why I have chosen a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach for this research topic, but I have not indicated which qualitative approaches are most useful and appropriate for my purpose. I have thought about the five qualitative approaches, narrative, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory and case study and considered which ones applied to my study. The common ground is the narrative begins with the experiences of the individuals that are expressed in lived or told stories as a means of understanding and analysing the story. My study is concerned with examining what is happening at a conscious and unconscious level for the participants of the research and my inter-relationship with them as the researcher. I want to examine what the participants say about their experiences, but I am also interested in being attentive. It is crucial that I am attentive to what the participants may not say or may not be able to articulate. Also that I am aware and conscious of the features of the wider socio-political context in which they live, act and judge.

Quantitative researchers can easily and often plausibly make claims to being objective and independent of what they research. However, having chosen to approach this study through

qualitative research methods, what can I say about my objectivity and independence? If all qualitative approaches raise questions about how the researcher is involved in the research. There is also another issue here, to do with is the position of the researcher and the status of my findings. **As** an objective, independent social worker myself and being very involved in this work, can I dare claim objectivity and could I be accused of imposing my views and thoughts on the findings? There has been criticism that qualitative design methods have an absence of a “standard” means of assessing reliability and validity which could be directly replicated Robson (1993, 2011) argues to make the study more scientific one has to:

- Systematically consider the nature of the observations and the role of the investigator.
- Sceptically subject interpretations and assertions to challenges and disconfirmation.
- Follow an ethical code of conduct.

If these factors are incorporated into the study, then the study would be considered as potentially more valuable as it would be of good quality and a more socially responsible contribution to scientific research (Robson, 2011, p.15).

Smith (2009) has suggested the following strategies in attempting to make the study more robust and reliable. These are:

- Internal coherence – concentrate on a sample that is internally consistent (for example independent social work experts that have undertaken assessments of black and ethnic minority children and families).
- Presentation of evidence – present enough raw data to ensure that reader can interrogate the interpretation (i.e. link all identified themes and interpretations to specific quotes from the text).

- Independent audit or close supervision - allowing someone else to follow the chain of evidence in the final report (i.e. present cases in supervision and research seminars).
- Triangulation – using different sources to tackle a question including other research studies and relevant articles (i.e. an extensive literature review).

It is important that the study is valid and reliable. Robson (2011), alerts us to the point that the threats to validity are qualitative research; description, interpretation and theory. In relation to description, he emphasizes that the main threat to validity lies with inaccurate or incomplete data. In order to avoid this, I taped all the interviews and transcribed them verbatim. The next threat to providing a valid interpretation is by forcing a framework on the interview rather than allowing for an interpretation to emerge. Robson (2011) does not oppose stating the theoretical framework, but he clarifies that it must be subjected to checking of its appropriateness and possibly adjusting if necessary.

Accordingly, throughout the analytic process, I relied on my supervisors and other colleagues in the research seminars. The main threat to validity, is the researcher's preferences and bias, which may interfere with the interview and later on the focus of the study. For example, Andy and Chris appeared to give responses they thought I wanted to hear as I am also an independent social work expert. In order to avoid me falling into this trap I was interviewed by a fellow researcher and I also had lengthy discussions with my supervisors. In the interview with the fellow researcher I was able to think and process my own experiences as an independent social work expert.

In thinking about why I have chosen to use a psycho-social research method. Clarke and Hoggett (2009), state that the psycho-social researcher may experience a range of situations in which they are required to manage their emotions in a professional way and also to measure their feelings in every sense. Hunt (1989) further developed this by stating that previously research methods did not use psychoanalysis as a tool for understanding social phenomena. Hunt (1989) also states that subjectivity and self-under-standing are critical for this type of investigation. Briggs (2005) has stated that psychoanalytically informed research enables the study of complex interpersonal face to face relationships.

The Free Associative Narrative Interview (FANI) had enabled me to do this. It conceptualizes both the researcher and respondent as co-producers of meanings. It also allows the researcher to look at unconscious dynamics between the researcher and researched and the use of free association through narrative interviews. The FANI is the only psycho-social method that allowed me to consider the conscious and unconscious processes for the participants of my research. It enabled me to elicit a story from the participants of the research.

The story telling has much in common with the psycho-analytic method of free association. In the words of Holloway and Jefferson (2000, p35):

“the particular story told the manner and detail of it telling, the points emphasised, the morals drawn, all represent choices made by the story-teller. Such choices are revealing, often more so than the teller suspects.”

It also enabled me to look at various forms of unconscious communication, such as transference, countertransference and projective identification, which are present in the interview relationship. I am looking at why the participants of the research told me a certain part of the story. As I have mentioned above, the data

for this research are feelings, reactions, anxieties and other states of mind, but I cannot present myself as an objective observer of such feelings and states. My responses in and to the research is essential. I am in the research with some understanding that I have my blind spots. I need to be more aware of, that misunderstandings are always possible, that participants may find that they have revealed more than they were prepare for. I, too, in these interviews or when reflecting on them, may find myself somewhere where I did not expect to be and what I have heard can be potentially fraught with misunderstanding and/or unintentional exposure. Another point is that I need to be aware of my blind spots.

Walkerdine (1997) states it is important that researchers are aware of their feelings that are brought up in the interview, particularly when analysing the data. As stated above, in exploring my own blind spots I have discussed my research with my supervisors and within a peer group setting with fellow students and another researcher who interviewed me. This has enabled me to reflect and think about the research and my own blind spots. It is something that I have constantly reviewed during the process of collecting and analysing the data.

A very important part of my thinking about my role in this research, involves trying to conceptualise my part in what emerges as data, analysis and discussion, and the use I have made of the self. I have also thought about the concepts of the reflective practitioner and the defended re-searcher. These concepts are very relevant to my study. They have emerged from some studies using psycho-social research methods.

Holloway and Jefferson (2000), Frosh (2002, 2003) and Walkerdine (2001). The term "defended researcher" is important as the interviews will stir up uncomfortable feelings for participants of the research and the researcher. Hunt (1989) states

subjectivity and self-understanding are critical to research. My own subjectivity and self-understanding are clearly crucial to this study.

4.3 Ethical considerations.

Having explored some of the epistemological and ontological considerations involved in how this topic may be researched, I now turn more explicitly to ethical considerations. In the process of data collection, I have considered ethics very carefully. It is my assessment that ethics is particularly significant to psycho-social research. There are two sides to this. Firstly, my responsibility towards the participants of the research, and secondly my responsibility for managing my own anxieties and boundaries.

All the participants kindly gave up their time in the research so their wellbeing is paramount. Robson (2011) has outlined a code of conduct to follow.

I had to get the approval of Local Research Ethics Committee (LREC). This approval is attached. Holloway and Jefferson (2000, p20) argue, “there has to be a clear ethical framework to ensure the “care of the subject”. Ethical issues have to be considered throughout the whole research process from the research design, recruitment, interviews, data analysis and presentation. Clarke & Hoggett (2009) state, some of the key features and practices are as follows:

- Avoid harm.
- Obtain informed consent.
- Ensure confidentiality and anonymity.
- Handle the data with care.

- Provide access to necessary support (Smith, 2009, p. 54).

In thinking about harm. I refer to the work of Smith (2009). There are two points to consider. Firstly, one must always consider the extent to which exploring experiences may awaken or stir up a strong emotional response. This was particularly relevant in this study, as childhood memories were stirred in all the independent social work experts. There was also a level of acrimony and conflict stirred by the ongoing court process. I asked all the participants to share and reveal not only their verbal concerns, but also to allow us to interpret their responses in an attempt to understand their experiences. I am aware that some difficult material was stirred up.

It is important to ensure that there is a containing “safe” space to share their experiences, but also in the event that the interview is upsetting to ensure that the participants have access to additional support Smith (2009). I made myself available to Andy by agreeing to meet him a third time, as he wanted to meet again to discuss his feelings aroused from the previous interviews. I also agreed to meet the participants at venues of their choice to make it easier for them to participate.

I have already mentioned this above, but to mention again a second aspect of avoiding harm requires that in our role as psychosocial researchers, we should also be aware of the complexities that develop within relationships. Thus we must be sensitive to recognising countertransference, identifications and projective identifications. It is our professional responsibility to manage these responses thoughtfully and sensitively; hence clinical supervision and peer support is vital in ensuring that the researcher is aware of any possible negative

counter-transference or feelings that may be detrimental to the research relationship. Individual supervision from my supervisors and an interview by a fellow researcher and attending the research seminars were vital in helping me to identify my own feelings and to be sensitive to my responses in the interviews.

Informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity are all very important matters. The issue of informed consent is very important. All participants were provided with an information sheet informing them of the research and were asked to sign the consent form. They were given a copy of the consent form. The principal of confidentiality and anonymity is very important. Holloway and Jefferson (2000, p.90) state concealing a person's identity is more complex. I have had to make sure that I have taken out everything that may reveal the identity of the participants. I have tried my best to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. I have changed all the names of the participants and taken out any information that may reveal their identity.

It is also important to handle the data with care, there are simple practices such as ensuring that all raw, unedited data and transcripts are only seen by the research team Smith (2009). I have secured the data, dictaphone and laptop in a safe secure place. As I have stated above, I am also mindful of my "duty of care" to the participants. They entrusted me with their personal thoughts and feelings and it was my responsibility to ensure that I actually listen to them, rather than making the data "fit" into our pre-conceived ideas and research questions Smith (2009, p. 20). In preparing the research proposal, I did an extensive literature review to provide relevant background and justification for

the study. One may easily fall into the trap of developing preconceived ideas and suspected themes I refer to Clarke & Hoggett (2009, p. 20).

All the participants have shared poignant and heartfelt vignettes or even contentious issues. It has been my responsibility as the researcher to recognize when these should be omitted completely. There were certainly topics, which the participants did mention during the interviews or after the dictaphone was turned off. I have chosen not to include this in this dissertation because of their very personal nature. I have noted when the participants have felt anxious. Andy wanted to meet a third time. I was also patient with Bernice and Jane as they appeared anxious. I listened very carefully to Chris's painful outpouring. As there is a potential level of anxiety for the researcher and the research subjects. I have considered my own emotional responses to the situations that I am presented with. My supervisors and the interview with a fellow researcher assisted me enormously. I have considered ethics throughout this research and my obligation to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the participants.

4.4 Data Collection

Having given some attention to how philosophical issues to do with ontology, epistemology and ethics are relevant to this research, and the choices I made with respect to these issues, I will now turn to describing how the data was collected.

Firstly, to locate the actual participants of the research. I approached the National Association of Guardian ad Litem and Reporting Officers(NAGALRO).

This is the professional association of Children's Guardian and independent

social workers. It was formerly the professional association for Guardian ad Litem and Reporting Officers. I made the request by email to the NAGALGO website and requested if any independent social workers working with black and ethnic minority families wanted to come forward to take part in this research.

I received numerous responses, and I chose the first three ethnic black and/ or minority experts/independent social workers who responded. In addition to this a specialist project which provides an expert witness service for black families came forward. I decided to interview one of the social workers selected by the team and the manager as a part of the research. I sent out the consent form and information leaflet to the independent social worker experts, and I asked them to identify an assessment that they wanted to discuss, and from there the commissioner and parent were identified. The information leaflet and consent form were sent to the parent and commissioner. They were asked if they wanted to take part and it was only after their full consent was obtained that direct face to face interviews was arranged.

4.5 Development of the questions. Approaching the interviews.

I discussed the initial questions and the approach to the interviews with my supervisors and I developed additional questions again after discussions with my supervisors. All the participants were asked a question as detailed below. I have already covered the questions in chapter 1 and 2 but I will recap.

The independent social work experts were asked.

"I am interested in your reasons for taking on this assessment where race and culture are an important feature of this assessment. I am interested in your personal reasons for taking on the assessment and your experiences from taking on this work.

Please take as much time as you want.

The commissioners were asked addressed as follows:

"I am interested in your reasons for commissioning an independent social work expert where race and culture are an important feature of this assessment. I am interested in your experiences. Please take as much time as you want."

Similarly, the parents were addressed in this way:

"I am interested in your experience of this assessment where an independent social work expert undertook the assessment. I am interested in your experiences. Please take as much time as you want."

I met with the independent social work expert first. I negotiated the venue for the meeting with each independent social work expert. Due to the flexibility of their role, I was flexible and creative in how I met with the independent social work experts. Two of the social work experts (Andy and Eve) wanted to meet over lunch in the community. I met the other two (Chris and Ivy) in their respective offices. I obtained their consent to record the interviews, and I transcribed the interviews after the meetings. I went through the transcripts with my supervisors, and I formulated follow-up questions. I met with the independent social worker experts a second time again in a venue of their

choice and again I recorded and transcribed the interviews. I met with one social worker expert(Andy) a third time after he communicated with me by email over some issues that arose from the second interview. There was an issue about boundaries and maintaining a third position, which I have discussed in the findings/discussion chapter.

I met with the commissioners in the venue that they chose, and this was in their respective offices, apart from one that wanted to meet me at the Tavistock Clinic (Jane). I decided with my supervisors that one interview was sufficient with the Commissioners. There was a difficulty with one Commissioner (Jane) where several attempts were made to meet with her, and in the end, she decided to meet me at the Tavistock clinic. This is explored in chapter 5. I was able to meet with one parent(Edward). In the other cases, one parent had died a year after the court proceedings had concluded. In two of the cases, the parents were upset, angry and depressed about the outcome of the proceedings and either did not want to meet with me or were hard to locate as they changed their telephone numbers and I had to give up **trying to find them**.

All the interactions with the participants were treated as sources of data. This study has consisted of the interviews as I have had no other interaction or meetings with the participants. I recorded the interviews and transcribed these verbatim. However, to protect the participants I have not included everything that they have revealed to me. I have discussed this with my supervisors. I have also paid particular attention to transference, countertransference experiences and recurring themes.

4.6 Data analysis stages

I have outlined the stages in the following table.

Stage 1 sharing of transcripts of the interviews and discussion in supervision with my supervisors.
Stage2 Written notes taken of the feedback from my supervisors to think about the themes.
Stage 3 Gathering of themes through immersion in the data. Themes were recorded and discussed in supervision.
Stage 4 Gathering the transference and countertransference occurrences through immersion in the data. There was a discussion in supervision.

I developed four cases. These are as follows and are discussed in chapter 2 case studies and chapter 6 biographical connections.

Case 1 Andy and Bernice (the parents were unable to be interviewed as they were angry with the outcome and did not answer any of the mobile telephones provided).
Case 2 Chris, Davina and Edward.
Case 3 Eve and Jane (mother died one year after children placed with her).

Case 4 Ivy and Jessica (this is a slightly different case as it is project which offers an expert witness service to a particular cultural and racial group. The parents became depressed after losing their children and did not wish to take part in the interview.

4.7 Thematic analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006, p.2) refer to thematic analysis as a method of:

“identifying, analysing and reporting patterns(themes) within the data. It minimally organises and described the data set in detail. It interprets various aspects of the research topic. Boyatzis, (1998).”

They also refer to Boyatzis (1998) and Roulston (2001) stating:

“thematic analysis is a poorly demarked and rarely acknowledged qualitative research method”. (p6)

It also appears that there has been a debate as to whether or not thematic analysis constitutes a recognised research method or whether it is a tool or a skill which can be used across a range of qualitative methods of data analysis.

Attride-Stirling (2001), Boyatzis (1998) and Tuckett (2005) have argued that thematic analysis does not exist as a “named analysis” in the same way that other methods do (for example narrative, grounded theory). However, to counter this Braun and Clarke (2006, p7) argue that a great deal of this analysis is thematic, but it is called something else such as discourse analysis or content analysis. In other words, thematic analysis is a method in its own right, but it has different names.

Braun and Clarke (2006, p9) argue that the advantages of thematic analysis are that it is flexible. The researcher will need to decide what the themes

identified in the analysis represent. Joffe (2011, p.209) refer to a theme as having a “specific pattern of meaning.”

For Braun and Clarke (2006, p.82), a theme captures something important and it shows a patterned response and meaning in the data. Boyatzis (1998, p.6) cited in Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006, p.83) describe a theme as a pattern in the information that at a minimum describes and organises observations and at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon. All attempts to define a theme involves the presence of a pattern. There is a recognizable configuration of meanings which co-occur in a way that is meaningful and systematic rather than random and arbitrary. Thematic analysis has suited this research as it has allowed flexibility.

4.8 Difference between thematic and other qualitative methods.

Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006, p.82) describe thematic analysis as involving a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon (under investigation) and constituting a form of pattern recognition within the data.

Braun and Clark (2006; p8) further explain that thematic analysis differs from other analytic methods in that it seeks to describe patterns across qualitative data such as thematic discourse analysis, thematic decomposition analysis, IPA and grounded theory.

In their words (p15)

“the exact form and product of thematic analysis varies so it is important that the questions outlined above are considered before and during thematic analysis.”

There appear to be no hard and fast rules as how it is undertaken. The most important point is that the finished product contains an account of what was done and why. They explain on (p15) how to undertake a thematic analysis.

The steps are as follows:

- Familiarizing yourself with your data.
- Transcription of verbal data.
- Generating initial codes □ Searching for themes.
- Reviewing themes
- Defining and naming themes.
- Producing the report.

In this study I have followed the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). From the initial research questions outlined in chapter 1. I developed 15 supplementary questions.

They were as follows:

Question 1

- How has the background, racial origin and belonging to an ethnic minority group affected the assessment?

Question 2

- How have structural inequalities/ discrimination, marginalisation and alienation impacted on the work?

Question 3

- How has thinking about culture, and the meaning attributed to **and** affected the work? and what does it mean to the client that they worked with?

Question 4

- What has been the framework of practice that is used?

Question 5

- How has placement within families and placing outside the family (such as adoption) been managed within the assessments?

- Question 6

How has conflict been managed in the case?

- Question 7

How have boundaries been maintained?

- Question 8 (biography, reflection and maintain the third position)

Has the choice of the case or assessment consciously or unconsciously mirrored a relationship with one or another parent for the practitioner?

Question 9

- How has the third position - stepping back - reflecting been maintained?

Question 10

- How have certain tools been used to assist practice, for example supervision, reflection, personal therapy?

Question 11

- What was felt, experienced, observed in the interview space?

Question 12

- How did the researcher feel about each independent social worker expert, commissioner and parent? What was the countertransference?

Question 13

- What feeling or emotional state did the independent social work expert, commissioner and parent appear to be in and to communicate?

Question 14

- What understanding did independent social work expert/parent / commissioner seem to have of their feelings, emotions and those of others?

Question 15

- What relationship or attachment did independent social work expert/commissioner/parent create with the researcher and what might be understood about and from them?

From these questions I developed four categories

- Category one (questions 1 to 3) relates to the types of cases/assessments presented by the independent social work experts/commissioners. The cases/assessments appear to have particular features. All the families/parents/children are from a particular ethnic minority background/ racial origin/cultural background. Factors such as structural inequalities, discrimination, alienation have had an impact on the assessment process.
- Category two (questions 4 and 6) relate to the framework of practice used by the expert social work practitioners/commissioners and how this has helped them to make a recommendation as to whether the child(ren) returned to the parents or were placed away from the parent.
- Category three (question 6 to 8) relates to the notion of conflict, which a feature of the material presented as all the assessments are in the context of court proceedings. Conflict is a natural process. The conflict may be as a result of the triangular relationships of the expert independent social worker, parent and commissioner. There are also conflicts between the professionals and anxiety from the commissioner projected onto the independent social work expert. Within this,

there is a consideration of what may be going on consciously and unconsciously for the three participants. There is then the inter-relationship between myself and my research subjects. This leads to a consideration of thinking about all this to generate a more in-depth analysis of the data.

- Category four (Questions 9 to 15) is the ability for the independent social work experts to step back and use tools required for reflection and supervision.

These were applied to the interviews and case studies to develop themes. I have used the case study method to bring together the interviews. There are four case studies (which centred around the assessment of the family member). The independent social work expert was asked to identify the actual assessment or the case they wanted to present, and from there the commissioner and parent were located.

The case studies were analysed using the main research questions as a basis. From the initial research questions, I developed additional questions these are stated in chapter 1, chapter 3 and chapter 5. The questions were formulated following discussions in individual and group psychoanalytical supervision and upon an initial reading of the individual case notes. The transference and countertransference response from myself has been a very important element of the research, and I have given considerable thought to this. I will now move to discuss the case study method. **4.9 Case Study Method**

In respect of the case study method. Yin (2003) argues **the** case study research has traditionally been regarded as a “weak sibling” compared to other research designs such as experimental studies. However, this appears to have changed.

The case studies' unique strength is its ability to deal with a variety of evidence-documents, artefacts, interviews and observations. Yin (2003; p.8) further states the strength of the case study method is its ability to examine an in-depth case within its real life context and this enables important topics to be investigated which are not covered by other methods. Bromley (1986, p23) adds, the case study method helps to make direct observations, collecting data from natural settings. I used my research questions to form a structure for the thematic analysis of the data and the literature review to focus on theories and concepts to inform my analysis.

One of the interesting aspects of case studies is that you might ask questions during a field interview, the answers which you may believe that you already know. A key demand of the case study method is the investigator's skills and expertise at pursuing an entire and sometimes subtle line of inquiry at the same time as (and not after) data is being collected. A good case study investigator appears to mimic the role of a good detective.

4.10 Anti-Oppressive Research.

In this study involving thinking about race, racism, anti-racist social work practice, it has been very important to have two supervisors. My supervisors have consisted of a white/British man and a black/African/Caribbean/British man. Both respected academics and psychotherapists. The seminar group I attended was a mixed group. This assisted in the process of reflection and discussion about the complexities of the research material. This has been important as I have been researching issues of racism and anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practice. McLaughlin (2012, p.73-93) discusses undertaking

anti-oppressive research and he pin points some of the difficulties and issues. It is important to remain objective and neutral.

4.8 Transference and Countertransference.

I will now move to explore transference and countertransference. I have stated a number of times in this study that the impact of the material from the research participants on myself and my response to the material has been very important in generating the data. The supervision I have received from my supervisors has been crucial. This has enabled me to think and reflect on my own responses and blind spots and separating my practice as an independent social work expert to that of the researcher of this study.

Before, I discuss the countertransference responses in particular and the data that has been gathered. It is important to define transference and countertransference.

4.11 Transference

A very useful definition of transference is one used by Hunt (1989, p.57-58). She states that as researchers become immersed in the research they develop different kinds of relationships with research subjects. She further explains:

“close ties which emerge in the relationship between the re-searcher and the participant of the research is particularly conducive to the mobilization of transference.” “Both the researcher and the subject routinely impose archaic images onto the person of the other. Sometimes the transferences develop independently.” Holloway and Jefferson (2013, p44) explained transference as simply:

“the unconscious transferring of other emotionally significant relationships on to the therapist by the patient”.

4.12 Countertransference.

Ruch (2010, p.35) explains:

“we might react to someone seeing us as a punitive parent by unwittingly going into that role and acting precipitously or harshly or equally we might react against such feeling by unconsciously over compensating, trying to avoid being seen as too harsh and perhaps making too many allowances. Such reactions are known as countertransference are the responses to these feelings.”

The processes are unconscious, and one may not be aware of them.

Countertransference was not always considered useful. Clarke and Hoggett (2009, p146) refer to Freud explaining analysts unresolved unconscious conflicts hinder psychoanalysis unless they are able to overcome these unconscious conflicts. The work of Sandler, Daze and Holder (1992 p146) and Heimann (1950, p81) add a further dimension to counter-transference. They explain in respect of countertransference analysts achieve an unconscious awareness of the contents of their analysand's psyches long before they reach any intellectual under-standing. There was also a concern that analysts may misunderstand or misuse the feelings aroused in them to the detriment of their work.

The use of the self is important. Unlike a therapist as a researcher, I do not need to be in personal analysis and there is a danger that I might pick up the wrong end of the stick from the material produced out of the research. Hence a discussion of my feelings that emerge from the interviews has been very important. I have discussed any difficulties that have emerged with my supervisors. Clarke and Hoggett (2009, p.151) explain how important this is and they refer to the work of Clarke (2002); Holloway and Jefferson (2000); Clarke (2002) and Melody and Walkerdine (2003).

As a further precaution to assist me to separate my own material from that of the participants of the research I was also interviewed by a co-researcher, and I have also discussed the material in the research seminars. This has helped to explore my emotional responses. Holloway and Jefferson (2000) state as a researcher, the researcher's emotional responses are considered useful.

Ruch(p35) explains that there is a distinction between personal and diagnostic counter-transference. In the personal counter-transference our own templates may be inappropriately activated. In diagnostic counter-transference we can (on reflection) learn to use our own understanding of the ways in which we may risk being drawn into an unfamiliar or inappropriate response to help us make sense of the other person's unconscious communications.

Regarding the relevance of transference and countertransference as a research tool. Hunt (1989, p58) highlights:

"transference is used to refer to the researcher's unconscious reactions to subjects and some aspects of their world. Countertransference is the researcher's unconscious reaction to the subject's transference".

In **the** research, there was a resistance to the idea that the emotional responses evoked in researchers might be useful (Holloway and Jefferson 2000; Oakley 1981). Holloway and Jefferson (2013, p47) are very clear that researcher's feelings have been recognised as another form of data. Hence for this research the transference and countertransference responses to each of the participants has been important way of collating data. I will discuss the findings from the data in **chapter 7**.

4.13 Chris

I will now move to discuss the case of Chris as a practical illustration of the dynamic process of collecting the data. Chris's case study, like the other case studies, illustrates some of the complexities and dilemmas **in** assessing a family where there are complex issues of race, gender and culture. I have used the interviews with Chris to illustrate the practical application of the research methods, with a particular focus on the use of transference and countertransference. This interview also shows how the containment from a psycho-social researcher enabled Chris to talk about a difficult, painful assessment. He was able to make links to his personal experiences which enabled him to undertake an insightful and informed assessment to assist the court in determining the outcome for the child.

4.12 Containment.

Although I met Chris in his office, I felt that he very quickly became the patient. I took out the tape recorder out and switched it on. Chris commented, "I do not know how to do this." Chris disintegrated from being composed to a state of panic. He spoke about the thoughts in his mind, which did not appear directly relevant to the assessment. It was not easy for me to understand what he was saying. I continued to listen to try and make sense of what he was saying. In the second interview, something happened that seemed to indicate that he had brought into the conscious material that had previously been unconscious. He was able to establish a link between himself and the child who was at the centre of this assessment. I discuss this further in the chapter biographical connection and transference and countertransference.

Chris spoke a great deal about the difficulties of assessing a parent and child where there were issues of race and culture and how this had led to differences of opinion between the professionals, and his practice as a black professional was questioned. He stated remarked:

" talking about this makes me feel angry, and I stated if I had been earlier on in my career, I might have felt defeated. Things are not perfect for this man, but what I have said all along that he is amenable to professional input. There are issues he needs to learn, but he has cooperated, absolutely everything I have asked him to do he has done it willingly."

Chris identified racism as the root of the conflict. He stated:

"I think people make it complicated for all sorts of racist reasons. I would go back to racism I do not say it is not culture. It is important to understand, but I think it is secondary."

4.13 Summary

This chapter is concerned with methodological considerations, with matters to do with how I might go about researching this topic. The chapter moves from the more philosophical matters (to do with ontology, epistemology, the place of the researcher in the research), ethical considerations, to more practical issues to do with data collection and what was involved in collecting the data. In this chapter, I have discussed the reasons for using the free association narrative interview (FANI) and the practical issues around collecting the data and hopefully I illustrated through the case of Chris the live and dynamic process of collecting the data and the how the relationship between the participants of the research and the researcher can be used to collect the data. In the next chapter, I will be considering case analysis using thematic and narrative analysis. I will be exploring some theory and then the practical analysis and from there, **I will** explore the themes that have come from the research.

5. Chapter 5 Case Analysis

5.1 Introduction

I have presented the case studies in chapter 2 and I have explored methodological considerations in chapter 4. In this chapter, I will continue with a discussion about the practical task of collecting the data. In the second section, I discuss the themes that have been generated from the thematic analysis. The third section will explore narrative analysis and countertransference response experiences and an examination of conflict. The chapter is concluded with a summary.

5.2 The practical task of collecting the data.

My primary sources of case analysis were the transcripts of the tape recordings of the interviews with the participants of this research. I discussed the interviews with my supervisors and I sent the transcripts of the interviews in advance of the supervision sessions. I also discussed some of the interviews in the seminar groups with my fellow students. This helped **me** with thinking and reflection about the themes from the cases.

I read through the written data several times and from these I wrote the narrative case studies, the countertransference experiences and the biographical connections (chapter 6).

The following themes emerged from the cases/assessments presented by the independent social work experts/commissioners. The themes have been coded A to C.

I have taken quotes from the interviews with the participants to illustrate the themes.

5.6 The Themes

Theme A1 is immigration status. This came up four times. In all the cases the parent's immigration status in the UK was a serious issue affecting the stability of the parent(s) which impacted on their ability to parent.

- Andy "identified some immigration issues as the couple were not able to access any support services." □ Chris "there were also concerns in respect of the man's immigration status and right to remain in the UK. He had no family in the UK to support him. The Local Authority removed the child."
- Eve "eventually she was able to convince social services that the children should be given a chance to live with her and they did and that is a very good outcome except she is still an illegal immigrant. I don't know if she has been allowed to stay or not."
- Jane "The mother was a refused asylum seeker" and had obtained temporary housing."

Theme A2 is whether the parent is legally allowed to remain in the UK (asylum issues, recourse to public funds) This has come up four times. The implication being that the parent(s) being assessed were vulnerable, unable to seek state assistance and living illegally and in some cases such as the parent presented by Chris forming a sexual relationship to secure status in the UK.

- Andy "technically he could have been deported. He had no income, so he could have been deported". They were very suspicious of him".
- Chris "The reality is that he is here illegally. He arrived here, he was here for a while. He was the lodger, and he started a relationship with this woman. Probably this was not the most sensible thing to do. But I think he was trying to survive. How was he living, one should not be quick to judge? He did try and make his relationship work, but I felt a bit creepy about him first of all. When I spent time getting to know him. I got the sense that he was trying to survive."

- Bernice “The parents came to the attention of social services, **due to the father’s** inability to provide for the children. He was unable to work or access services. Neglect and poverty became an issue as the parents were unable to feed and maintain the children. Housing was also an issue as the family were living in a one room in a hostel setting. The children were going to school hungry and asking the teachers for food.”
- Ivy “They were new to the country. They were very poor and did not know many people.”

Theme A3 Loss of control. This came up three times. The parent(s) expressed a loss of control as a result of the intervention of the state, and they were unable to focus on what was expected of them by the intervention of the state.

- Andy revealed “the parents became very upset when they heard my recommendations and they changed their mobile number several times. They were very angry with professionals and refused to engage.”
- Edward “I never met her (the Guardian) for 16 months. She never comes to me and she never talked to me. She has no idea of my daughter. She is treating me like someone from the Africa. I am not from Africa, I am from the Middle East and it is a different mentality, different culture. She saying like Middle East people are violent. In the court when my solicitor was talking in the room. She told me that she is talking that it is as if you are from the Middle East that you violent. I said I am not. She never spoke to me when we had the LAC meeting when I spoke to her. She made a face, I can feel that this person is not honest”.
- Ivy “the parents were so upset that all their children were removed. Although they attended the community forums. They refused to engage with professionals. They were too depressed.”

Theme B1 is working with difference and minority groups B1 Racism. This came up three times.

- Andy “excluding the interpreter meant the parents had to speak English and this was racist as the father could speak some English, but the mother's English was quite poor. There were issues of how the children were relating to their mother.”
- Chris “I think people make it complicated for all sorts of racist reasons. I would go back to racism. I am not saying it is not culture. It is important to understand, but I think it is secondary. "I think racism is really fluid and it is really sneaky, and you never arrive at the sort of place where you put your feet up really. It sneaks up on you. It is a fluid thing.”
- Jane “well you are always worried about racism, aren't you? I know from experience from my many accounts in my personal life and work life that it was not true. It is all too easy

criticism to make. My reaction was how I could demonstrate that it was not true. How can I show it? I transcribed some of the interviews with the interpreter questions and answers to demonstrate that I was not a racist".

B2 Culture This came up six times.

- Andy "I don't think there has actually been any case where I was specifically asked about issues of culture, but it always comes up in the way that culture is part and parcel of everything that you do so it is what I say to take account anyway when we are looking at assessments and when I am doing assessments."
- Chris "the mother tried to make it a fight over race and culture."
- Bernice "regarding culture, every single family have a culture."
- Edward "I am from the Middle East and it is a different mentality, a different culture."
- Ivy "reading all the reports you can see there are lots of misunderstandings. Just difference in the culture, all of that. No one was taking that into consideration. The wrong decision was made. The child could have stayed in a happy family. I felt deflated, disappointed and angry because I felt that it was an injustice. It should not have gone that way. Because you could even see the misunderstanding from the home where they were living."
- Andy "there were lots of cultural issues, the interpreter, Goan community, it is a small community".

B3 Apartheid. This came up once.

- Andy "Apartheid South Africa that is my background and my family emigrated there in the mid 1990s and it was in my studies as a social worker that I came to realise how abnormal Apartheid was. You assume that it is **and it is** normal as a child."

B4 Religion and religious difference. This came up five times.

- Andy "parent's religious beliefs were very important in how they functioned".

He linked this to his parents who were also Christians. He elaborates:

"They are very religious. They were Catholic, my family are Christians, but I am not religious. Obviously, religion is a part of my culture as well."

- Ivy described her projects work with the local community, including the local Churches.

"I attend church, I understand the importance of the church for parents and the support that the churches provided and the influence of religious leaders."

- Chris raised the issue of Islamophobia and the impact on the Muslim community. He believed the father he was assessing was treated differently and was discriminated against because he was Muslim. (I refer to B5).
- Andy was concerned about the views the parents held in respect of the foster carers who were Muslim and the parent's anxiety that their daughter may become a terrorist as a result of living with Muslim foster carers. (I refer to B5).

B5 Islamophobia/Muslim Community. This came up twice.

- Chris "I just felt if it had been a Muslim woman and a girl it would not be as simple racism such. I think gender stuff comes in as well. Err it might even be if he was a Christian bloke with a Christian child. Just the ordinary of that background. It was because he was Muslim."
- Andy "I did not speak about the family themselves, because the girls were placed in a Muslim family and the family itself had expressed views against that, and they were quite racist actually. The girl is being brought up as a terrorist. They are Muslim and will teach her to be a terrorist, and I challenged them on this. This is where it is a link how we all can be racist. It is how we place ourselves in different positions."

B6 Speaking the same language. This came up three times. The theme of not being able to speak the same language and how this impacted on understanding where the parents came from.

- Chris "this is an example you see because I am not of his culture, and I am not of his religion, and I don't speak his language, but there is a connection based on our difference."
- Eve "I think the difficulty is language sort of Chinese immigrants come here trying to learn English is so difficult".

- Bernice “the reason for using an independent social worker in the case was due to major difficulties in finding someone that could speak the language. They tried to use the local community organisations, but it became apparent that the people they were using knew the family and other family members. The department felt that it would be fairer to use an independent social worker who also had the language skills.” (However, the social worker chosen did not have the language skills).

B7 Use of interpreters, this came up four times.

- Andy “in a way it was quite racist telling the parents not to speak in your language and only to speak in English. The father could understand because he could speak English. He could communicate with the children in English. With the mother, it was more difficult because her English was not that strong and she could not communicate freely with the children. They could see how the children were behaving. It was a big risk **isn’t it?**”.
- Eve “It is particularly difficult when there is an interpreter. It is very difficult to interpret quite well and correctly, using certain terms, because Chinese is quite a rigid language. In English, there are so many different explanations for emotions. The interpreters do not understand social work type English. It is incredibly difficult for the right nuances to be interpreted and translated to the clients.”
- Jane “the social worker accused the multidisciplinary team of not having an interpreter and being misinformed about what had been said and they said no, on the contrary, they had an interpreter. The key issue is the English. She learnt quite a bit in prison. Then she was working in a British Red Cross Charity Shop. It was pretty good. She did understand when I had interviews with her”. She further explained, “what I had hoped when I interviewed her with an interpreter was to get to the deeper aspects of her feelings and her ability to understand the children's feelings.”
- Ivy “I think the interpreter was brought in when they were told to go into a residential home, mother and baby home. So they can assess both of the couples. I advised them to ask for an interpreter. But I cannot blame the Local Authority too much. What I know is a lot of Africans tend to nod and say yes and pretend that they understand when they truly do not understand. I don't know if they fear that they will be labelled and not able to understand English properly. They might be scared, or maybe they did not know they had the right to ask for an interpreter.

We still see some of the families that we work with. **We say** you must ask for an interpreter.”

B8 Working with difference. This came up five times.

- Andy “I don't know if you need to be from the same background to be competent in working some cases. In some cases, it would help the parents or the family to be from the same background. But sometimes it makes it worse. It can make it more challenging. Um you know I was thinking of this one case I was instructed and the father was from Eastern Europe and we shared the same first name. I found it more challenging. I think you can be more objective maybe not coming from the same background.”
- Chris “talking about this makes me feel angry, and **as I** stated if I had been earlier in my career. I might have felt defeated um things are not perfect for this man, but I have said all along that he is amenable to professional input. There are issues that he needs to

learn, but he cooperated. **Absolutely** everything that I have asked him to do he **did** it willingly."

Chris spoke about his struggle in explaining how difficult it was to convey to one professional in particular that the father he was assessing was open to working with professionals.

- Bernice "I do not have the skills to work with some Pakistani families. An ISW had been used to undertake an assessment in Pakistan, and the quality of the assessment was poor in her opinion, and it left the Local Authority in a difficult position."
- Chris "the mother was looking at me in court. **She is mixed parentage in the same** way that I am White and of African/Caribbean descent. The father I identified him as a man of colour. But he is not. So if you see me sat next to this woman you might even think she was a member of my family or something. So as far as that sameness goes."
- Davina "there was no thought about race and cultural issues." But she believed that it was "really helpful if the assessor is from the same background. That helps." She also stated that "more thought does need to go into choosing the assessor, **because** of the timescale we have to go with what is available."

B9 Cultural matching. This came up four times. It was felt that being of the same culture as the parents being assessed was not a requirement. However, Chris and Ivy found that it was an advantage to develop a deeper understanding.

- Bernice "it was not easy to match this family with a culturally appropriate worker." She stated there were issues around confidentiality within the community and interpreters being sacked as they all seemed to have contact with the family."
- Andy "I felt it was an advantage not being from the community that this family orientated from."
- Chris "I think my gender or race was a factor as to why I got involved as an independent social work expert in this case."
- Ivy "The **country** I come from is the Sudan, and they also come from the Sudan. Another connection is I grew up in the northern side I was born and brought up in the northern side of Sudan. This couple also lived in the northern side of Sudan. There are two connections. I was able to know and make that connection with them. Both cultures where they born and where they grew. I was also connected to that culture where they were born and where they grew up. I understood the languages, the way things were done. So I was able to connect with them."

C Tools and key concepts in working with families

C1 Confidentiality This came up three times

- . Andy "the Local Authority were worried that interpreters used from the community also knew the family. There were language issues, and interpreters were used. There were concerns that interpreters were colluding with the parents."

Andy felt as a non-Asian he had less danger of colluding with the parents (even though he had a meal with them.)
- Bernice stated that, "there were serious issues about confidentiality and the fairest way to get around this was to use an independent social worker who could maintain confidentiality".
- Ivy explained, "I think it is important to keep boundaries and not to get over involved in cases". This was very relevant as Ivy attended a church where some of the families she was assessing also attended. It was important for her to maintain boundaries.

C2 Use of community and community resources. This came up three times.

- Andy "the community in which the parents lived were involved. The local priest had written a letter. The interpreter had visited the home. It impacted on the assessment I was unable to use an interpreter. I had stopped those sessions for a while. The reason why the interpreter was terminated, it informed the assessment as well. There were counter allegations about what the interpreter had said. Father is blaming her really for what was said and what went wrong. The interpreter was from the same community."
- Chris "I assessed the father. I kept it as natural as possible. I took him around ordinary tasks, meal preparation, playing in the park, road safety. When he did not understand I used people to help interpret."
- Ivy "I made the parents comfortable and **I did not place pressure on them**. It was important to understand the community that they came from and outside pressures. Their background was crucial."

C3 Assessing. This came up four times.

- Andy explained, "I am commissioned to undertake assessments as opposed to anything specific to him regarding race and culture".
- Ivy, however, felt "very sad". She explained "when I read the reports" she noted that there were "cultural issues that people did not understand".

She stated "even the professionals that they were working with did not know and felt that some of these misunderstandings were held against the parents(families)".
- Chris stated that he spoke to the child psychiatrist who was also commissioned. In his words:

"There had never been any joint sessions with the child psychiatrist. She had seen the child sometimes without him, and I was not instructed to do this. She saw the child in the foster placement and I was never instructed to do this."

- He also stated that "The Guardian did not like him, and he did not rest with her."
- Eve "it was important to understand for some Chinese parents the drive for the children to work hard and to excel at school had caused a lot of difficulties within Care Proceedings. Social services and the school had found the parent to be too harsh for an example a parent making the child practice the piano for 2 hours, making them do homework and not letting the child play and the mother then stating "I have sacrificed everything."

C4 Taking account of risk factors. This came up five times.

- Bernice(Commissioner) "Andy had done a very good assessment and was pleased. Most of his recommendations came true. The allocated social worker had been threatened by father and it was felt better for the case to have a male social worker."
- Ivy "one of the risk factors was that, the mother she was assessing was struggling with her own losses and bereavement."
- Jane(Commissioner) "the risk factors had been covered adequately by professionals particularly the early childhood experiences of the mother. The mother had a horrendous early life. She had been sold by a woman who had brought her up in Vietnam and she was working in a market **carrying heavy things**. At the age of 14 years she was sold by someone from China who took her back to China as his wife and beat her and she had a son." She talked about that and she was in tears when we talked about that and she certainly had emotions. She sold a gold ring from this guy and had been beaten. She had been an abandoned child in Vietnam. She had been brought up by someone else who had been good to her. I just felt that she was cold and she had the most awful damaging experiences and
that is the conclusion the assessor A had come to."
- Chris stated that "the legitimate risk was he was an unknown quantity and there was a question of the whole stability of his life."

C5 Specific factors in evaluating risk. C5a Learning difficulties. This came up once.

- Bernice "his wife had learning difficulties. It did not initially come out as her language and English was very poor. It was not clear if this was learning difficulties or language."

C5b Mental health. This came up four times.

- Bernice “the father continually revisited the past and it was difficult for him to move on. He continually went back to the past.”
- Ivy “the mother was depressed. She was “struggling and dealing with her own losses/ bereavement. She still had to cope with two children. She was not coping with collecting her children on time from school.”
- Chris “Edward(father) formed a relationship with a woman with mental health difficulties.”

C5c Addiction/Drug and alcohol. This came up once.

- Jane “the parents had been imprisoned in Manchester. They were arrested for having cannabis in the car and working on a cannabis farm.”

C5d Child trafficking. This came up once.

- Ivy “there was a suspicion that the parents she had assessed had been involved in child trafficking. The police had been watching them. It appears that they stayed with a friend who the police suspected of child trafficking. This meant they were implicated as they stayed with this friend.”

C5 domestic violence. This came up four times

- Andy “domestic violence was the issue. It was a consistent concern”.
- Bernice there was domestic violence from the mother to the father and she was in police cell. The woman was trying to protect herself. This made it difficult for the ISW to complete the assessment in the way that he would have liked to.”
- Chris “there had been 17 allegations of domestic violence from the mother. Couple of allegations from the children, the male child had hit him, which he denied. “He went on to explain “she was an attractive woman and she had phoned the police on him 17 times and accused him of domestic violence, but I do not believe that he was ever violent towards her.”
- Bernice “this poor woman had no chance. He continued to manipulate and control her.”

These themes illustrate the complexities of the assessments that have been presented and I will discuss them further in chapter 7. It is the culmination of these themes that have made these assessments complex. This has contributed to the anxiety generated in the

commissioners, which has been outsourced to the independent social work expert. I will now move to discuss narrative analysis.

5.8 Narrative analysis

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain that a narrative enquiry is an umbrella term which captures the personal and the human dimensions of experience over times and takes account of the relationship between individual experience and cultural context.

Etherington (2000,2006,2007) defines narrative analysis as a means of systematically gathering, analysing, and representing people's stories as told by them. The focus is on the narrative and the researcher says very little and acts primarily as an attentive listener. The stories are reconstructions of the person's experiences, remembered and told at particular points in their lives to a certain audience.

In this study, I am the audience to the participants of the research (the independent social work experts, commissioners and parent). As the stories are the reconstructions of independent social work experts, parent and commissioner's experiences. The context of how the story is told is important. In addition, the audience and also the purpose of telling the story will have bearing on how the story is told and presented. The inter-relationship between myself and the participants in how they tell the story is also important. It is a dynamic process. There is also a process of co-construction as described by Polkinghorne (1995). This means researchers take in what is being said and compare it with their personal understandings, without filling in any gaps in understanding with 'grand narratives', but rather inquiring about how pieces of the stories make sense together.

I have analysed the narrative interviews of the independent social work experts, commissioner and the one parent (that I managed to interview) and the following themes have emerged. They are coded a to c.

Each of the independent social work expert and the commissioner has used a framework to assess parents and the children. There are a number of factors that impact on how one undertakes an assessment.

A The interplay of race, culture, religion in assessing parents/families.

Andy believed that he had been commissioned to undertake the assessments as opposed to anything specific in him in terms of race and culture. He identified domestic violence as a feature in the case and the family **originating** from a particular region in India. From his account it may not have been easy to match this family with a culturally appropriate worker. In addition to this there were issues around confidentiality within the community and interpreters being sacked. They all seemed to have some contact with the family and have been colluding with the family. Andy was very clear that it was an advantage not being from the community, that this family originated from. He also spoke about the religion of the parents and he felt that he understood their religious beliefs as his parents were also religious. The local priest was supporting the parents. Andy identified religion, culture and race as being important factors for these parents.

Chris raised issues of culture, religion. He felt that fact the father was a Muslim was very relevant as he believed his father had been treated differently, because he was Muslim and **he** came from a certain part of the world. "Dad was from the middle east". For Chris it was very simple. In his words:

"The father was warm, he demonstrated empathy. He was able to work with professionals."

He assessed him to be a good enough parent. He felt that his gender, religion and background were being used against him by one professional in particular. The Children's Guardian. Chris identified religion, culture and race as being important factors for the parent he was assessing.

Ivy explained many of the parents she assessed did not understand the child protection system and process in the UK. She explained in Sudan they do not have a child protection system and the children's social care does not exist in Sudan. She spoke about the importance of the local churches in working with the parents.

"We are known in the community because of the children of the work we do in the Christian places of worship so they let people know about us. So that is how they contacted us."

Ivy identified religion, race and culture as important factors in the parents she was assessing and supporting.

Eve spoke about the tensions of placing the children in a black placement which appeared culturally suitable, but it turned out not to be suitable for the children. In her words:

"I think because the children went to this Vietnamese black family, because of the cultural thing, which obviously is the right thing to do you know. But the family could not cope with meeting the demands of the son."

She stated although the foster placement reflected the children's heritage it was not able to meet the children's needs. She also spoke about the skills she utilised in assessing the mother taking account of her culture and race. She identified culture and race as being important factors to consider in assessing the mother.

B. The child and the parent at the centre of the assessment.

For all the participants the child(ren) and the parents were at the centre of the assessment.

Andy felt that he could understand where the parents and children were coming from and one of the areas he was able to understand was the domestic violence. Chris felt:

"the father demonstrated warmth and empathy and his parenting ability was the most important factor for the child. He could parent and this was the central issue for the child, not that he was a Muslim or a man from a certain part of the world."

Ivy stated that parents came from Sudan and they came with their two daughters.

Unfortunately, by the time the parents came to their service it was too late as all their children

had been removed including the girls that had been born in Sudan. She explained the impact of parents/families not understanding the child protection system in the UK. In her words:

“mother was struggling dealing with her own losses and bereavement. She still had to cope with the two children. Whilst the husband was trying to make a living as a motor mechanic, because that is the skill that he had. So mum went into depression and was not coping well with taking the children on time to school or collecting them. The school were picking up on all of this. Of course she did not understand the system. She was new in the country. She had no one to really explain to her about the system.”

Eve described how the mother she assessed changed to meet the children's emotional needs. This was something that the Guardian had challenged. She described her observation of the birth mother: “when I saw them in the home they had one attic room on the top of the house. It was not a big place. They were so much more contained. I think mother showed that she is able to cope and was very good in doing everything, giving them boundaries and she was able to incorporate a lot of the things that she learned.”

For all the independent social work experts assessing the ability of the parent to meet the child's needs and provide good enough parenting was very important and central to their assessment.

C How conflict was managed.

Bernice and Andy.

There appeared no conflict between the commissioner and the independent social work expert.

Bernice started off saying that Andy was instructed by her legal team, but then explained that the “real” reason for using an independent social worker on the case was due to major difficulties in finding someone that could speak the language spoken by the parents. They had tried to use the local community organisations, but there was a difficulty in that the people they were using knew the family and other family members. The department felt that it would be fairer to use an independent social worker who also had the language skills and did not know the family members. There were issues about confidentiality. Bernice believed that the fairest way to get around this was to use an independent social worker who would maintain

confidentiality. She revealed further complexities. There were difficulties with the father's personality. The mother had learning difficulties and or language difficulties. Bernice felt the mother had no chance as the husband was manipulating her and controlled her. There was an anxiety about domestic violence.

Davina and Chris.

Davina informed me the local authority were anxious as the Local Authority social worker did not have time to undertake the detailed parenting assessment due to their work load. Although the allocated social worker had a feel of the case and felt that the father's parenting was good enough. Also the child should be placed with him. She was a Pakistani Christian and she felt she had some understanding of the complexities of race and culture.

She picked up the tensions in the case. She stated:

"I think to resolve these tensions professionals need to be open minded and they have to have regular contact with the parents. To see what they are doing, what the interactions with the child are and clear observations need to be made to make the decision."

Jane and Eve.

Jane explained that a significant aspect of the case was the disagreement between her and the social worker. There was a difference in how they approached the psychological assessment. She did not see the report as positive, whereas the Social worker viewed the report as positive. It was this difference of opinion, which led to Eve being commissioned.

Jane was honest she did not fully agree with Eve's assessment. She had to accept it, but an element of doubt remained in her mind. She was upset in the way the children had been removed from the foster placement. Jane was worried once the children were placed with their mother they may not reveal any abuse out of loyalty to their mother.

Jessica and Ivy.

Jessica appointed Ivy to undertake the assessment. She explained this assessment brought up some complex issues. She explained the treatment both she and Ivy received when they attended a meeting. A conflict emerged in the meeting with the social worker and Team Manager from the other Local Authority. The social worker was a white/British male and the Team Manager was an Asian woman. Jessica explained:

“The Team Manager was not in control of this particular worker. I am not sure what the dynamics were. He presented as more dominant. Even we made our views felt the Team Manager did not make any comment at all. She felt if there was a need for a further meeting we should come back.”

The difference in approach to the case brought out a real divergence in approach during this meeting. Jessica and Ivy felt that they were not treated as professionals and were seen as support workers. Jessica explained that she supported her team by giving them:

“regular supervision and case discussions on a fortnightly basis. This helped to contain anxieties. We have case discussion every 2 weeks. Because of the complexity of cases. I felt there was a need for a case discussion and help them through the case and contain the anxieties.”

She described their unique model where they continued to support families after the assessments were completed by inviting them to community forums. In her words:

“we run the community forums, we still tell them to use the community forums and still worship in the churches. When we go to Community forums we have our food. We all stay and eat, talk and network. We cannot say when the case is closed and we cannot talk to them. This is very alien to them. To suddenly end may seem hard how manage. The community forums prevent isolation for the families.”

The parent Edward stated:

“for me it is the good way at least he can make the difference. If you put an independent person in a case like my case. He can make the difference. He is not from the social work department or the Government department.”

The assessments presented are all complex and anxiety and conflict was a feature in all the assessments presented. There were in the case of Chris, Ivy and Eve professional conflicts and anxiety over whether the child(ren) were safe with their parent(s). In the case of Andy, the professional conflicts were not so apparent, but there were conflicts with the parents, the father in particular with professionals.

The independent social work experts had to reassure the commissioners that they were placing the needs of the child first and their assessments made safe recommendations.

5.9 Summary of the conflict that has emerged.

Conflict has featured throughout this study. I have referred to the impact of conflict on the participants in the case studies. I will now summarise the nature of the conflict that has been presented.

For Andy and Bernice there was no overt conflict as they appear to hold similar views about the family and the requirements of the assessment. Andy was selected because the commissioner felt he could be trusted. He had previously assessed five families in total for this Local Authority. The commissioner believed that there was less danger of him colluding with the parents as he was from a different racial and cultural background. A male worker was required, because of the violence from the father. Andy held similar views to the commissioner. He believed as he was from a different background there was less danger of him colluding with the family. Unknown to the commissioner, Andy had a biography that appeared to suit him to this particular family. This is explored further in the chapter biographical connections. Despite the lack of overt conflict, Andy felt there was some racism due to interpreters not being used. There appeared pressure on the commissioner as a priest had been assisting the parents. **Interpreters** from the community were visiting the parents in their home. They appeared some pressure from the Goan community on the commissioner as the parents were apart of this community.

For Chris and Davina again there is very little conflict. The commissioner required the independent social work expert to have an understanding of race, a professional who was open minded and was able to observe the interactions between the child and parent. The commissioner already had a view of the father which was favourable. However, the conflict emerged between the Children's Guardian and the independent social work expert. The commissioner felt that valuable time was being taken up with the conflict. She stated:

"the allocated social worker had a feel of the case and felt that the father's parenting was good enough and the child should be placed with him, but the case took so long with a number of assessments."

She was unable to comment on what was going on in other people's heads. The Children's Guardian questioned Chris's assessment. She questioned the child being placed with her father in light of the concerns raised about him.

Chris was upset that there was no communication between him and the Children's Guardian and she had never seen the child with the father. This lack of communication led to an entrenchment of the conflict. The conflict was resolved by the Children's Guardian going off sick and a new Children's Guardian being appointed. Chris raised racism as a feature of his life and professional experience. He believed that one of the issues had been a Muslim father wanted to parent a Muslim female child. For Jane and Eve there was a similarity to the conflict described by Chris and Davina. Jane highlighted a disagreement between herself and the Local Authority over the assessment of the mother. Jane wanted the mother to be assessed by a neutral professional who understood the mother's background. Eve had formed her own view of the mother based on her own assessment. The conflict arose when Eve's view was similar to the view of the Local Authority. For Jane there was an element of doubt. She was worried once placed with their mother, the children may not disclose abuse. She perceived the mother to be emotionally abusive. Eve had a different view about emotional warmth. Jane had to accept the assessment, but continued to have doubts based on her earlier experience of the mother.

For Jessica and Ivy there was no conflict between them as Ivy felt very supported and contained by

Jessica. The conflict was based on the professional dynamics with the Local Authority and how they were perceived as experts. They raised racism and the dynamics between professionals in terms of how they were viewed as professionals in the context of race and gender.

5.10 Countertransference responses.

In chapter 4, I have defined transference and countertransference. Cooper (2017, forthcoming) in chapter 15 entitled “Entering the underworld: unconscious life and the research process” reminds us of the importance of countertransference in psycho-social and psychoanalytic work. He refers back to the work of Clarke and Hoggett (2009). Cooper urges us to think at a deeper level. He explains:

“the notion of ‘entering the underworld’ is double edged. He refers to the doctoral students studies he has supervised at the Tavistock clinic. In his words” many of the projects undertaken by social work and social care doctoral researchers at the Tavistock give some voice and recognition to populations of vulnerable, marginalised, disempowered people; and similarly to dimensions of professional experience that lie outside the reach of our familiar theoretical and practice discourses.”

The way data is interpreted by the researcher using a psycho-social and psychoanalytical research is very important. Under the supervision of Professor Andrew Cooper and Dr Onel Brooks I have tried to approach this study in an orderly and systematic way. However, this has not always been easy with the material from the participants. They spoke as the thoughts and ideas came into their head. Also thoughts and ideas came into my head which I analysed in supervision with my supervisors reading the material.

In considering countertransference, I have been mindful of Holloway and Jefferson’s (2014) concept of defended subjects and the anxieties generated in the participants of this study and also myself as the researcher. I have also been mindful of the key elements of the transference and

countertransference elements of the interviews are located not in the material, but in the relationship between the researcher and the interviewee including the way the researcher's own defences are mobilised. Cooper (2017) reminds us of the work of Ogden:

“psychoanalytic work is conducted in the field created by the meeting of two or more people who bring into their relationship their unconscious life”, referring to this as the analytic “third”. This is dependent on “two contributors”.

The relationship between myself and the participants of this research is very important. Cooper (2017) again reminds us:

“the key transference and counter-transference elements of the interview are located not in the material, but in the relationship between the researcher and interviewee, including the way the researcher's own defences are mobilised. To decode these processes requires a more psychoanalytically attuned researcher”.

In my discussions with my supervisors and discussions within the research seminars the following themes emerged from the interviews with the independent social work experts:

- Hunger, importance of meals and being fed.
- Mental distress, anxiety, unresolved childhood trauma relating to relationships with parent(s).
- Boundaries.
- Injustice emotional pain.
- Complexity and a search for simplicity.
- Experience of prejudice towards researcher.

5.11 Hunger, importance of meals and being fed.

5.12 Andy

Andy explained (chapter 2 context of the assessment para 2.13) one of the reasons for the removal of the children was due to:

“the parents (inability) to feed and care for their children. The children were going to school hungry and asking teachers for food”.

I found this interesting as Andy very quickly informed me, (prior to the tape recorder being switched on) of his worries about being able to feed himself by securing enough work. He informed me he had returned from a meeting with his bank manager. He had managed to secure a loan as he was worried that he may not get regular independent social work. I immediately felt some concern for him and I was grateful he had taken the time out to meet me. At this point I was unaware that food and meals would be a significant issue. As it was lunch time my immediate response was to offer to buy him lunch to compensate him for meeting with me. Some research on attachment has indicated that food is one of the earliest and most fundamental forms of pleasure and distress experienced by the infant Bowlby (1969); Friedman (1996) Bowlby (1969) have stated that food and the resolution of the anxiety generated by hunger provide an important early arena in which these attachment patterns and affect regulation develop.

Over lunch, Andy revealed something which appeared important and crucial. **The parents he assessed were unable to feed their children. However, they offered Andy** a meal which he accepted. Andy explained (chapter 2, paragraph 2.14) that he felt he had formed a good relationship with the parents and he decided to share the result of his assessment over a meal with them. However, after this his relationship with the parents broke down as they were not happy with the outcome of the assessment. As I was listening to this account. I started to wonder if Andy would have revealed that he accepted a meal from the parents if I had not brought him lunch. I also wondered if the parents felt that Andy needed to be fed and they were trying to show Andy they were now in a position to feed their children. Andy felt that there was something culturally significance in having a meal with the parents. He accepted their kind gesture in the same way he accepted my kind gesture. I brought lunch for Andy as I wanted to give something

back to Andy for giving up his time. I also felt sorry for him when he informed me about his financial position. I wonder if Andy also felt sorry for the parents and felt it was easier to break the bad news over a meal.

5.13 Chris

Chris spoke about how he observed the father cook a meal in his home. Chris assessed and observed the father in the community. When I visited Edward he had baked a cake for me. I was struck and warmed by his generosity. However, with Chris I felt that he was deprived of something and this emerged in the interviews. He offered me black coffee as he had run out of milk. I declined his offer as I do not drink black coffee. Momentarily, I also felt deprived but I appreciated his gesture of offering me a drink. I also wondered if he had been able to afford to buy milk or had the time to go and do shopping (in other words was he able to care for himself). This was relevant later as the theme of feeling loved and cared for and actually being wanted as a child was apparent in how Chris described his early experiences, particularly since his mother was given such a hard time over having a dual heritage child and his father had abandoned his mother.

There was another relevance to this as I felt as the interview progressed the theme of black and white was very apparent. Chris revealed the battering he had received from the Children's Guardian (a white woman). He described being attacked and having to defend himself. He felt it centred around the issue of race and racism. He comments about this in paragraph 2.36. I could not help feeling that there was something symbolic in him offering me black coffee and I wondered if Chris was making a statement to me about white and black. A number of thoughts went through my mind. He explained his hurt and distress over not being able to speak to the Children's Guardian:

"I can't get a sense of what more happened in the case as I never actually spoke to this Guardian" His rage had an element of violence "I want to fucking get her. I was going to get her." Although Chris explained that he "did not want to beat her physically".

My feeling at the time listening to him was that he was so upset and angry he was unable to contain himself. He appeared to want to hurt her as she was hurting him by using her power over him (she pushed for another expert and the court sanctioned this.) He was very upset. Chris acknowledged the pain. (paragraph 2.37). He explained if he had been less experienced he may not have been able to cope or manage the attack on his professionalism. I felt a sense of admiration for Chris for being honest about his pain and it made me think about some of my own experiences as a black

professional having to prove myself. I felt that Chris was revealing and talking about the painful reality of racism. The words of Davids (2011, p1) “to be black in a white world **is** agony” came to mind and in my mind there was an image that Chris had been severely assaulted. The work of Onel Brooks (2014, p50) also came **into my** mind when he talks about his experiences and examines the notion that some professionals feel that “it has nothing to do with race”. When I listened to Chris I felt that it was very much to do with race and how black men in particular are viewed and thought about. Chris also raises concerns around Islamophobia in respect of the Muslim father he assessed (paragraph 2.38). Although Chris does not use the term Islamophobia this came into my mind. This also relates back to some literature in this area for example Orr (2014), examines the role of Pakistani men in street grooming in Rochdale, her work clearly argues (p202):

“the perception of the danger of Pakistani men and street grooming is totally disproportionate to the reality.” She argues that it has happened “when the level of Islamophobia in British society is intensifying.”

I wondered whether the level of Islamophobia intensifying in British society was also in Chris’s mind. He had mentioned his prejudice against Pakistanis as a child so I did wonder if he felt

some guilt and this had fuelled his conflict with the Children's Guardian that he felt showed prejudice.

5.14 Eve

Eve invited me to meet her in a lunch break near to where she had been undertaking an assessment. She felt it was more practical for her. I paid for the lunch as I was grateful to Eve for giving up her time. Eve unlike Andy did not mention **financial** difficulties. My overwhelming feeling over the lunch was I had fed Eve and in turn Eve felt nourished and poured out a great deal of information. She went to great length to explain her background, her journey into independent social work and the kind of work she had been undertaking. Eve spoke with great enthusiasm about her work with Chinese families and how she had moved into undertaking independent social work. My overwhelming feeling listening to Eve was her passion and dedication to the assessments she had undertaken. She mentioned all the towns and cities in the UK that she had undertaken assessments and did not turn down a request to assess a Chinese family. Her commitment to the work was admirable. I was grateful she spared the time to meet me was over lunch. The outpouring of information and the speed at which this information came out did leave me feeling overwhelmed. This seemed to link to her comments (paragraph 2.56).

“when I go and see a family they never stop talking for 2-3 hours.”

She referred to “stilted communication” when interpreters are used. I wondered if Eve felt like the families she assessed. **In that** she was able to open up to me, because I was able to understand her as she understood the families she assessed. I did feel, despite feeling overwhelmed at times that I could understand her. **This may be to do with being an ethnic minority and English is my second language.**

In the second interview Eve asked me to meet her in her home. She made lunch for me. For some reason I was expecting a Chinese meal instead I was met with a combination of French

and British cooking. I was surprised, but it revealed Eve's unique background and the choice she had made in the choosing her partner. I also briefly met her white/British husband and saw photographs of their son who was dual heritage. There was a richness in her background and life experiences. This was reinforced by her comments to me when she gave me a lift to the station as it was too far for me to walk. She informed me that her sister had married a Chinese man who was a Christian and they had both married men that they could trust. She stated that they were:

"both reliable men and she had now spent more time in England than Hong Kong so she was probably more British."

Ivy explained the approach (undertaken by the project that she worked for) in respect of black families. Feeding and nurturing the families was an important part of the work. As I listened to Ivy my overwhelming sense was that she felt nurtured and supported. I refer to para 2.70 of her case study. She explained how supervision and case discussions helped her to manage and contain her own anxieties. She did not feel isolated in her work and this related to the support that was offered to the families to reduce isolation and one of the ways of doing this was to "share food, talk and network". I felt that she was communicating how important meals and feeding were to her work. She explained in the community forums which took place in the local churches, meals were always provided and support was given to families as well as networking. This was reinforced by her Manager Jessica. Jessica explained how relationships are made through the sharing of meals through the community forums that they run. In her words:

"we all stay and eat, talk and network. We cannot say the case is closed and we cannot talk to them. This is very alien to them. To suddenly end may seem hard to manage".

It made me think that working with the black communities involved creative practice, particularly with the different cultures and communities. It made me think about the literature about working cross culturally and using an anti-discriminatory/anti-oppressive framework, particularly the work of Anane-Agyei (2002).

5.15 Mental distress and anxiety

Unresolved issues of trauma relating to relationship with parent(s).

5.16 Andy

I felt during the first and second meeting with Andy that there was something missing. However, I was unable to put my finger on what may be missing, until Andy asked for a third meeting. At the end of the second meeting when the tape recorder was turned off Andy mentioned (paragraph 2.24) there was no chance to talk about “one’s early experiences”. In the third meeting Andy spoke about his experiences living with his own parents and the impact on him and his siblings. This is explored further in the chapter biographical connections. I did wonder if the impetus for Andy finally revealing this was as a result of me inviting him to the Tavistock clinic for the third meeting. The Tavistock clinic offers and undertakes clinical work with individuals, families and couples.

In the first meeting with Andy, prior to turning on the tape recorder I felt some distress in Andy as he had finished meeting his bank manager and he revealed his anxieties about being able to survive financially. He revealed the domestic violence between his parents and later how he could identify with the children in the assessment he undertook. This is discussed further in the chapter biographical connection. Andy mentions secrecy and I felt that he had been carrying a secret which he finally revealed in the third meeting.

5.17 Chris

Chris’s distress and anxiety was apparent in the first meeting. He did not talk about the assessment, but went straight into talking about himself. Later he revealed the pain he had suffered growing up as a dual heritage child, his experiences of racism, the verbal abuse his mother suffered, his experiences of looking different from his siblings and rejection by his black birth father. This is discussed further in the chapter Biographical connection. I felt I could understand his distress over his professional expertise being questioned. There have been

times when my professional expertise is questioned, but experience has shown it is all part and parcel of the work of the work and one has to develop a thick skin. I also felt that Chris was trying to say from his experiences he had developed a thick skin. He was honest about his verbal abuse of “Asians” calling them “Pakis”. Although I am Pakistani I did not feel it was an attack on me, but an honest account of someone in pain lashing out the unbearable pain on others weaken then himself. I felt that Chris was able to understand this.

5.18 Eve

It took time for Eve to reveal any mental distress and anxiety and when she did present it, it was done in a very matter of fact way. I felt distressed listening to the story thinking it must have been very difficult for her as a child. This is discussed further in the chapter Biographical connection. She recalled an incident involving her parents when she was 8 years old and she was taken by her mother to confront her father. Eve informed me that she had never discussed the incident since it happened with anyone. In her words:

“she did drag me along. So that there cannot be sort of a big fight, because I was there. I was there to calm the situation down. I did not say anything.” She explained that it was easier for her mother to be seen in public with a child as opposed to being on her own. “It was less obvious if it is a woman with a child than a woman on her own. You know loitering somewhere people look at you and wonder what are you doing. It is like you are walking a dog. There was child nobody would question why you are loitering I was more of prop for her to avoid unwanted attention”.

My immediate response was this poor child is caught in the middle, how must she be feeling and I wonder what she made of being there. I felt it must have been quite upsetting and painful for Eve and I wondered if she had blocked out her feelings as she presented the incident in such a matter of fact way. However, as she continued her story she explained how other memories from her child hood had faded, but this memory was so clear. She later linked this memory to her perceptions of men and the conscious decision she made as to how to raise and bring up her son.

In her words:

“why am I always so suspicious of men? It is almost like an automatic reaction which is not very nice. It

was a big challenge to have a son. (laughed), a big challenge (laughed again).” She explained the conscious decision in raising her son in a particular way. In her words, “I made sure I raised him in how I felt men should behave “being, empathic, being sort of thinking of other people. So he is quite laid back.”

She further explained:

“my biggest reward and compliment came totally expectantly a few years ago. Some people were chatting. He told them I am the only child.” She further explained that everyone was surprised as he does not behave as the only child. She explained that her son was not selfish, he thought about other people, he was friendly and he did not always want his own way. She was pleased in bringing up her son “I have done something right”. I could feel her pride and achievement and I wondered as she did not say that she had brought up her son not be like her own father.

This made me think that Eve had thought about the dynamics between her parents and the incident she described when she accompanied her mother did have a significant impact on how she had approached her life and work.

5.19 Maintaining boundaries.

As a researcher it was important for me to maintain my boundaries. However, this is difficult when you get close to people and listen to their stories. Cooper (2009) refers to the notion of “losing our minds”, referring to “research that is truly practice near, we risk losing a clear sense of where the boundary lies between ourselves and other people.”

When I met with Bernice in her office. She spoke about another assessment of a family she thought originated from Pakistan. She explained how she felt she did not have the skills to assess this family. My immediate impression was that she was trying to explain to me the issues in the assessment that had been commissioned to Andy was different to this particular assessment that she was struggling with and it was ok to have an independent social worker who was not culturally appropriate. I wondered if there was guilt or some justification from Bernice for not commissioning the assessment to someone who was more culturally

appropriate. However, as a researcher it was not my place to comment on this so I tried to keep my thoughts to one side.

Bernice went on to talk about boundaries in the assessment. She explained how “community members became involved, which resulted in the Local Authority appointing a social worker who was not involved or linked to the parents. I was left with an impression perhaps if there was a culturally appropriate independent social work expert Bernice believed that they would not be able to maintain boundaries. She explained in respect of the Pakistani family, the assessors in Pakistan had stayed in the family home and the assessment had been rejected so it did appear in her mind someone culturally appropriate was unable to maintain a boundary.

5.20 Andy

Andy also spoke about boundaries, explaining how over the Christmas period the interpreter’s involvement was terminated and it left the parents with no interpreter for the next 2-3 months. This was due to the Local Authority discovering that the interpreter visited the parents in their home. However, Andy appears to have also broken a boundary by informing the parents of the outcome of the assessment over a meal. I wondered in an assessment where there were issues about boundaries, whether this had been a sensible thing to do. I then thought am I being judgemental?

However, after Andy explained to me what took place, I felt that my initial feelings were correct. Andy explained despite his thoughts, he felt he had a strong relationship with the parents. The parents stopped engaging with him and the other professionals. The parents were expecting a positive assessment and by sharing a meal with Andy they were treating him as a friend or a member of the family. I wondered if it had been sensible to share a meal with the family and inform them of the outcome of the assessment at the same time.

I wondered if I had also got drawn into breaking boundaries. Firstly, should I have brought Andy a meal. I was aware I felt sorry for him. I also had a very clear feeling after the second meeting with Andy that there was something missing and I wondered if I had also got drawn into breaking boundaries by agreeing to meet Andy for the third time. I had suggested a further meeting at the Tavistock clinic as Andy asked for a third meeting. He explained that he could not afford to travel to the Tavistock clinic. However, despite my reservations. I felt I learnt more and understood Andy more by meeting with him in his own space. He was able to link his biography to the case that he presented. It made him think about having therapy and the cost of therapy meant it was something he could not afford. In his own words:

“It is my more my financial situation it is trying to find funds for it. Yeah I was speaking to a friend of mine who is in therapy and I was looking at other options.”

Poverty appeared to feature heavily for Andy. I was left with an overwhelming impression after meeting Andy for the third time how lonely and difficult this work was for him and the link between supervision and therapy. He appeared to recognise the impact of the work on him.

Jane however was keen to meet with me at the Tavistock clinic. I realised how difficult and anxiety provoking it was for her when she missed the first meeting and did not arrive at all. When I emailed her to rearrange. Her response was that she had the meeting in her diary, but she had forgotten where it was taking place. I thought this was strange as she wanted to meet at the Tavistock clinic. I wonder if she felt uncomfortable about the meeting and it must have been daunting to go to the Tavistock clinic. Perhaps I had underestimated the impact of having a meeting at the Tavistock clinic as well as a place for learning it was also a working clinic.

When I did meet her at the Tavistock clinic, I was met with some frustration, as I did not inform the receptionist which room I was in. I assumed by emailing the details this would be enough. Due to Jane's anxiety about this I apologised to her. The feeling that came to mind was perhaps I had taken a short cut and in Jane's eyes not doing this properly. This idea or thought that went

through my mind, became relevant when Jane started to tell her story. Jane (case summary paragraph 2.58). She was keen to convey to me that she wanted to do things properly. She wanted to start at the beginning and describe the twists and turns in the assessment as Eve had been instructed in the final stages of the case. I felt Jane was informing me that the assessment was complex and there were a number of strands and it could not be simplified. I listened carefully to her account.

However, it was after the tape recorder was turned off that she revealed her real anxiety (paragraph 2.62). She was concerned about being called a racist and she recalled black students that she taught colluding with families that they were assessing. I thought it was interesting she waited for the tape recorder to be turned off. I did not respond to this comment, but I did think that despite her desire to do things properly she did not reveal what was really bothering her during the taped interview. She like Bernice felt that black practitioners would collude with the black families and perhaps I would collude with Eve as I was a black student completing a professional doctorate. I was pleased that she was able to reveal what was really bothering her. However, in my mind what was bothering her was something quite serious.

5.20 Sense of injustice

The theme injustice has been apparent for all the participants of this research.

5.21 Bernice

As I have mentioned Bernice chose to talk about another family. Initially when I went to see her in her office. My immediate countertransference response was that she was responding to my physical appearance as she assumed that I was Pakistani. She explained that another assessment was bothering her as she could not understand the family. Whereas, the family Andy had assessed she felt was more straightforward. She felt that it was difficult to find

someone that spoke the same language and understood the culture. She also stated that there were problems with finding interpreters. My response was confusion as I could not understand why it was so difficult to find someone culturally appropriate. Bernice appeared agitated about the Pakistani family. She wanted to talk about the Pakistani family so I listened to her. However, when she talked more about this family, it was clear that they were Indian and not Pakistani. I sensed that there was real confusion about the background of some of these families. Her comments where she would not have a clue about Pakistani families.

My countertransference response **was** I felt a sense of injustice to these families and parents. It appeared that one rule was being applied to one family and another rule to another. Perhaps because it had been too hard to find someone who was culturally appropriate to work with the family and also speak the language and had no links to the community and the focus should be more on addressing the issue of working with the aggressive father.

5.22 Chris

Chris raised his concerns about being asked to repeat the assessment he had undertaken. Chris also raised the issue of assessing Muslims and Islamophobia. In his words:

“I think if he was a Middle Eastern woman and female child I think there will be less distrust of him. because he is a man. A Muslim man and it is a little girl. They have not been ready to accept that he can do it”.

My countertransference response was the injustice in terms of the money that was being wasted and what was really going on in this case. Chris explained very nicely:

“I am not accusing someone of being racist and it is the worst thing you can say to somebody. If you are going to say that to somebody you had better mean it”. He further added “she just did not trust him; I think because he was a Muslim man.”

It puzzled him that one professional was being allowed to assert that there should be further assessments and the other professionals appeared powerless. Davina the Commissioner also raised her sense of injustice. She informed me through her assessments she already had a good idea about the father. There was a great sense of frustration about the delay that was

generated in the case. She felt that “Judges need to be firm to balance the views and opinions of the professionals.” My countertransference response was that although she was upset she raised the issues in a calm and measured way and remained pragmatic.

My sense was the commissioner was quite focused and wanted to remain outside of the conflict. However, I felt the conflict generated in this case had impacted on the child as the decision to place her with her father had taken so much time. I noted her concern in respect of the independent social worker having to repeat assessments. In her words “it should have been concluded within the timescale.”

5.23 Edward

Edward was the only parent that I was able to meet as I have explained in chapter 2. When I arranged the meeting, I did not anticipate that I would meet his daughter. However, seeing him with his daughter gave me an insight, which I may not have otherwise had. I observed the bond between father and daughter immediately and I noticed that he was a good father. His daughter was animated and very close to him. He was very warm and loving towards her.

He was very emotional and keen to talk to me. He appeared relieved to talk, and I felt there had been a real trauma for him. I felt a real sense of injustice. I now understood why Chris had presented in such an agitated way in the first interview. The real sense of injustice appeared apparent to me and the concern about multiple assessments. I felt an empathy towards Chris. **I also** felt that I could relate to his pain after seeing and feeling the father’s pain. I left the father with some powerful feelings that he had been treated fairly and with compassion by Chris.

5.24 The meaning of cultural and one’s background and identity.

Eve had also thought about her father and her perceptions of men and consciously had brought up her son to be very different from her father. I discuss this further in the chapter. She was very proud of her mother, but I did wonder if something had been lost as despite her love for her

Chinese culture and heritage. Her son despite a very good academic background was unable to speak Mandarin and did not chose to learn Mandarin as he was growing up. Overall, my counter-transference response was that Eve had a rich background and a real expertise in her assessment of Chinese and families from South East Asia. I also felt that the work she did with the families was at a deep level and she thought very carefully about her social work assessments. She also enjoyed yoga and looking after herself. However, unlike Andy she had the financial support of her husband. She revealed that she had chosen to marry a man very different to her father.

I have already explored this under mental distress. Eve spoke about her mother and the experiences of being a child bring brought up by effectively a single mother. Although she presented this in a positive way. I felt there was a sadness about her upbringing and when she revealed how at the age of 8 years she accompanied her mother to confront her father and his mistress. I immediately felt she had blocked out the pain. She later revealed that her views of her mother and father had affected how she had assessed parents. She was able to find empathy in the mother she was assessing as she was familiar with her own mother who had been a lone parent.

I felt honoured that Eve had shared this with me. My response was from a such a young age Eve had become a mediator between her parents. She also revealed as she drove me back to the station that her sister had married a Chinese man. But she has married a White/British man. She commented that they both married men they could trust. Her sister's husband was a Christian. They were both reliable men. I felt that they had made these choices as a response to their father. She also commented that she had now spent more time in England than Hong Kong so she was probably more British.

5.25 Seeking a simple solution.

Bernice was clear that the independent social worker chosen was to ensure that there was no collusion with the family. It did not matter he was unable to speak the language. I also felt that the commissioner did not really want to think about the challenges that this assessment or family presented and had simplified it to an argument that selecting an independent social work expert that was culturally appropriate or from a similar back-ground would collude with the family. Whereas someone from a culturally appropriate background may have found a way of working with the family. Jane supported a further assessment after she described a conflict with the local authority over the conclusion of a psychological assessment. Eve was her choice. but Eve came out with a different view to Jane. My countertransference response was that Jane was hoping Eve would reinforce her assessment and it would be simple end to the case and the Local Authority would be proven wrong in their assessment.

It appears the Children's Guardian in the assessment presented by Chris had a similar position. A sense of laziness when it comes mind when assessing cases where race and culture are involved. Chris made this statement:

"some laziness around race and culture. "people just get in-to some sort of tick box when they have to think about this that and other. There are such so many mixed heritage children these days and there are poor alternatives. One has to be creative and it is creativity for me really."

5.26 Fantasy about the researcher and impact of working with some one of a different heritage.

Chris like Bernice was curious about me and after the tape recorder was turned off. He started to talk about another case of a Bengali girl who was misusing drugs and he asked me if this was normal. I commented "it depends on what is going on for her". He replied that it was not normal. I replied it may be if there was some dysfunction. He then asked me if I had an arranged marriage.

I momentarily stepped out of the position of the researcher by revealing something about myself. In retrospect, I should have remained silent, but this illustrated to me being disciplined as the researcher is not always easy. It also illustrated to me that the way one looks physically will influence how you will be perceived and judged. Chris was brave enough to ask me something that was clearly bothering him in another case. It linked into his later revelation of expressing racism towards Pakistanis as a child.

I felt this was a very strange comment and judgmental comment. It also demonstrated his lack of awareness. However, I am very used to stereotypes about "Asian women". This indicated to me how difficult it is to understand other communities and cultures as stereotypes and misconceptions can stand in the way of achieving an understanding. This made me think it was important to try and find independent social work experts who have an understanding of the community/culture that they were assessing.

5.27 Summary

These experiences have been quite complex. There were times when I felt conflicted as well. As well as being a researcher I am also an independent social work expert. My own work as an independent social work expert has met with certain challenges and I have been able to relate and understand some of the experiences and challenges presented by the independent social work experts. There have been times when I have felt that there has been injustice to the families I have assessed for example interpreters not being used in courts, one Pakistani mother was not given the chance to participate through a video link from Pakistan when she was party to the proceedings. In another case there were a multitude of interpreters, but it appeared positions were already fixed. I have felt that short cuts are taken at times and there is some laziness. In one recent radicalisation case I felt there was a political dimension and pressure on the parties to follow a certain route for the young person concerned in light of events going on in the world at the time such as the Paris and Brussel bombings. In addition to this, a number of young

women had already gone to Syria (from the same area where this young person resided) and their parents had been very critical of the Local Authority, schools and the police. As the only Muslim expert appointment for the Care Proceedings I was not allowed to view the police despite four requests. It appeared to me that minds had already been made up well before I was appointed as the independent social work expert. The theme of Islamophobia has also been present in some of the assessments I have undertaken which has presented a challenge. However, as a researcher and under the supervision of two very experienced supervisors I have been able to step back, reflect and think about my work. I also think the independent social work experts were able to reflect and link their biographies to the assessments they presented by the end of the second/third interview.

To summarise the experiences within this research, the outcome sought by commissioners appear to vary. For some of the commissioners (Jane and Bernice) the desire for a simple solution was clear, the parents from a challenging black/ ethnic minority family present certain challenges so it is best to seek an independent social work expert from a different background who has the expertise to engage with the family being assessed. Also someone who will not collude and will(hopefully) reinforce the judgement that has already been formulated by the commissioner.

For Bernice there were certain challenges that involved the Goan community. The parents had involved a local priest and the interpreters appeared to collude with the parents. It appeared as well as the challenges presented by the parent. There was also a concern about the pressure from the local Goan community. I felt the independent social work expert chosen would not actively challenge the commissioner, particularly an independent social work expert who may already be vulnerable (for example Andy was worried about his financial situation) and may find challenging the commissioner difficult as he may not be paid. So although, I stated that there appeared no conflict between Andy and Bernice. It appears there was conflict going on with the

parent and the Goan community and this impacted on Bernice. In addition, to this Andy appears to have survived in his family and the experiences of racism in South Africa I think by quietly getting on with it. Andy raised his concerns to me about working without an interpreter I am not clear if he raised this with the commissioner. There may also be a laziness in assessing difficult and complex black families by cutting corners such as not using interpreters or utilising the correct independent social work experts.

Some commissioners(Bernice) feel they have already undertaken the assessment of the families and know the answers. They are seeking an independent social work expert from a particular background to reinforce their answers and conclusions. They do not anticipate the answer and the conclusion may be different. Finally, there are commissioners(Davina) that require the independent social work expert to spend time with the family(parent), engage with them and assess their relationship with the child(ren) and evaluate the risk. This will assist the commissioner in formulating a plan for the family. However, for the independent social work expert there has been a reason why they have been attracted to the work and in particular the families that they have presented to me as a researcher. I have identified my experiences under headings. In summary, **it appears** all the independent social work experts experienced some early trauma/ mental distress, anxiety that relates to one or both of their parents. If this is not processed and understood it can act as a block to thinking clearly. This will impact on the assessment and resolving conflicts that may emerge between the independent social work expert and commissioner. There is desire to be fed and nurtured. As a researcher there is a curiosity about who I am, and my background and interests. The area of boundaries is important. I need to maintain my boundary as a researcher, yet this is not easy as Cooper (2009; p.434) refers to "research that is truly practice near one can risk losing a clear sense of where the boundary lies between ourselves and other people". I am aware there was a curiosity about me as I was curious about the participants. I think there was a connection in Andy presenting an

assessment of an Indian family (although there were similarities to his birth family). I felt he was also trying to make a connection to me (although Pakistani I look Indian) as he may have felt that I would understand what he was talking about. Chris wondered if I had an arranged marriage and Bernice indicated she would struggle with assessments involving Pakistani families. In the same way I have to step back and maintain a third position as a researcher, the independent social work expert has to do the same. I did find some of the comments made to me slightly disturbing such as whether **or not** I have had an arranged marriage. It was very important for me to talk and reflect with my supervisors. The beauty of having two supervisors meant I had the chance to listen to two different positions and ideas. There were times when the discussions were difficult and painful. But one of the areas that I really appreciated with my supervisors was their ability to maintain their boundaries.

Related to hunger and being fed is the notion of allowing the independent social work **expert** to have a space for reflection and talking about their work. Ivy has described the nurturing she received from her supervisor through case discussion and supervision. In turn the project she works for feeds the parents and their families in their community forums by sharing food. The need to be fed and nurtured is important. Ivy has explained how she has felt nurtured and supported by her Manager. I would say the provision of supervision and a space for reflection is a means of being fed and nurtured. I refer to the literature in this area (paragraph 3.21 to 3.31). I will now move to explore the biographical connection for three of the independent social work experts.

6. Chapter 6

The biographical connection

6.1 Introduction.

In this chapter I propose to explore the relevance of the individual biographies of the independent social work experts. I propose to break down the data into small manageable components and proceed to link the interpretations of the data to a systematic analysis of the text. I will focus on the biographies of Andy, Chris and Eve. I will be exploring the following areas:

- Is there any reason to believe that the independent social work experts were motivated to embark on expert independent social work due to their biographies?
- Did the biographies of the independent social work experts sensitise them in particular ways to the issues in the respective assessments that they presented?
- How did the independent social work expert's biographies enable them to negotiate conflicts in the cases and between the agencies in a constructive way or did it make it more complex for them? Or was it a mixture of both? (I will refer to the earlier discussion on conflict).
- An exploration of how the biographical connection was both a strength and vulnerability.

I refer to the case summaries of Andy, Chris and Eve (chapter 2.13 to 2.24, 2.32 to 2.39, 2.50 to 2.57).

6.2 Motivation

6.3 Andy

Andy's motivation to embark on independent social work appears to stem from his unique background. **This** has involved a number of painful and traumatic experiences as well as more positive and enriching experiences.

Andy chose to discuss an assessment of a family which had a resemblance to his own family. Although, the parents he presented originated from Goa. The experience of his own parents gave him some insight into migration and living away from home. Initially, he stated that they were from a very different background, but after some thought he reflected:

“but there are some similarities in terms of you know, maybe the expectations of family?”

He identified religious belief as a common factor with his own parents:

“They are very religious. They were Catholic, my family are Christians”.

I noted that Andy tried to distance himself by stating “but I am not religious.” This was relevant as the parents he assessed held some prejudice towards the Muslim foster carers who were caring for the children and this made Andy feel uncomfortable.

Andy revealed the impact of certain factors that drew him to the kind of independent social work he was undertaking. He enjoyed undertaking cross cultural assessments, often when a male independent social worker was required. He was able to relate to the children at the centre of the assessment (2.15). The relevant experiences from his own background were the impact of apartheid, experiences of racism, domestic violence, moving away from his parents. His ability to reflect and think about his experiences and how these factors had an impact on him in terms of his development and relating these to the children at the centre of the assessment. (2.24).

6.4 Chris

Chris's motivation to undertake the independent social work expert work he has chosen has a number of complexities. He has unique experience of growing up in the UK as someone who is dual heritage. Unlike Andy, Chris showed more emotion and anger about his experiences. The assessment that Chris presented similar to Andy had parallels to his own birth parents. Chris grew up without knowing his black father. His mother a white/British woman had been subject to some violent, aggressive statements about her relationship with a black man and giving birth to a dual heritage child. In his own words:

"I am dual heritage, but my family (maternal family) are white, and I was not brought up in black culture, and that is critical. I was brought up in a white working-class culture, which was quite racist and there was a lot of racism. My mother did not know what she had got herself into when she had a mixed heritage child."

Chris spoke about what drove him to seek out black people on a personal and professional level and how this motivated him to undertake the independent social work he had chosen to do. In his words:

"I am anti-racist and I am just interested in different cultures and things like that, because I thought there was something lacking."

The black friends he had found had similar experiences to him. Again his words:

"My black friends seemed to have similar experiences to me."

He explained that his unique experiences have been that he does not "quite fit".

In his words:

"I don't quite fit so I have bonded more on experiences of racism rather than culture. My culture is very English."

It appears his experiences of dual heritage child who did not "quite fit" has led to professionals seeking out his expertise.

Again in his words:

“What I have also found is that people have come to me. Most of the work that I get tends to be children or couples that are mixed.”

He further explained how he had been given expert status:

“There is some mix going on and I am sort of given expert status in that I don’t know to what extent I am expert. I am expert of my own experience and I have been able to transfer it, but I am given that status expert. I also think on a more manipulative level solicitors come to me because they are getting ready for a fight and having a mixed heritage person in this fight is helpful or so they might think.”

Chris described his commitment to the work because he felt:

“there is some laziness around race and culture. People just get into some sort of tick box when they have to think about this that and other. There are such so many mixed heritage children these days and there are poor alternatives. One has to be creative and it is creativity for me really. I think my expertise is that I am able to sniff out in white families where it might be ok to place a mixed heritage child and where it is not. I am quite good at that.”

Later in his life, Chris found his black father who rejected him, but this experience appeared to motivate him to see the positives in father’s who wanted to parent their children. He explained “I found my black father recently” and how his father did not want to be with his mother as she was working class and he married a middle class white woman as his father is middle class. In his words:

“It was a class thing as well. My black family are middle class. He slept below stairs. My black father would not dream of having a relationship with a black woman. He would not marry a white working class woman either. He wanted a middle class white woman and that is what he got.”

6.5 Eve

Eve as stated in her case summary (2.51) is very experienced. She was born in Hong Kong. She like Chris and Andy has a unique biography, **which** she believed enabled her to engage with families from South East Asia in particular. She explained in Hong Kong she had a unique educational experience. She attended an Italian convert school in Hong Kong and

was taught in English. She also learnt Mandarin at home. This gave her access to both Chinese and colonial British culture.

She graduated from Hong Kong university. She was taught in English. In her words:

“you get exposed to education which is actually all English and Chinese is taught as a language. Chinese history and language we did in Chinese. The rest Literature, Geography were all in English. So you end up having a with slightly schizophrenic type education.”

It appears that this early experience combined with her experience in the UK gave her the experience and drive to assess Chinese families. She explained how her knowledge of Chinese cultural tradition that she brought with her from Hong Kong became useful. This was particularly the case when the families were unable to speak English and were unfamiliar with the parenting styles in the UK.

6.6 Their biographies sensitised them in particular ways to the issues in the assessments they presented.

Andy, Chris and Eve suffered some traumatic experiences as children that appear to connect them to the assessments that they presented.

Andy revealed the traumatic experience of witnessing domestic violence between his parents and the impact of this on himself and his siblings. He managed to escape the dysfunctional relationship between his parents, unlike his older siblings. He also grew up during the time of apartheid in South Africa. Andy indicated that thinking about and holding a position about racism was very important to him. He took a path that isolated him from other members of his family who he perceived as racist.

Interestingly in the assessment he presented domestic violence was a key feature. There were racist themes, interpreters were not used for a period of time, the commissioners did want to use an independent social work expert from an Indian background as there was a fear that there would be collusion with the family. The father made Islamophobic comments

about the foster carers. Andy felt an empathy towards the children. He revealed due to his own experiences he understood the experiences of the children.

Chris explained as a result of his heritage he had been robbed of a culture and he was brought up in a white/British culture. He adopted racist views against Pakistanis calling them “Pakis” as a child. However, as he became more aware he developed an interest in other cultures and sought out members of the black community. He spoke about the pain of racism, as a result of his early experiences. In his words:

“there have been lots of race issues in my family and some of my family members that I don’t speak to. So with regards to this, I have always been interested in different cultures. I always felt that there was something that I was robbed off.”

There are several layers to his experiences. He spoke about the damage in the relationship and his siblings which have been repaired over time. In his words:

“there were damaged relationships between my siblings and me. There has been a lot of healing.”

He witnessed abuse towards his mother for having a dual heritage child. He explained:

“it was lonely because of my attitude towards black people. It was profound to see my mother grounded **down** in that way. They thought she was a prostitute.”

He was constantly reminded that he looked different to his mother and siblings. He was aware of the physical differences. He elaborated:

“Even now when I have friends around and they see pictures of my siblings. You continually have to explain yourself.”

He also revealed that he had found his black birth father. Chris understood the importance of the role of the father and why for him it had been important to find his father. He explained:

“One of the beauties of finding my father. I was able to find out what my heritage was and I was able to say I was such and such. One of good things about finding my father was that I was able to find out what my heritage was.”

This experience of finding out who he was by locating a missing jigsaw puzzle his father motivated him to undertake the assessments that he did and also to work in a creative way.

In his words:

“I was very racist myself, because I was with my white families in some ways. I used to call them Pakis and things like that. I am ashamed to say. I had to live with that. When I was growing up in the mid 60’s, 1970s the Asians started to come over.”

He also explained the isolation that he felt:

“I got the racism and none of the fringe benefits. I did not have significant black person to have a relationship with.”

Chris also chose to present an assessment that had some connections to his earlier experiences.

The child at the centre was a dual heritage child, he assessed a black Muslim father who wanted to have a relationship with his child. The mother a dual heritage woman was described by Chris as a woman with a number of difficulties. He also indicated due to his background the mother felt he should identify with him. Chris recognised unlike his own father, this father wanted to have a relationship with his child.

6.7 Eve

Eve revealed a very significant event which took place when she was a child. Her mother went to confront her father about the affair he was having. Eve has revealed how the impact of her father’s affair has influenced her choice of partner and how she has brought up her son. In her words:

“I still remember so clearly it left me with a huge distrust of men um enormous distrust of men.”

This experience it appears left a lasting impression and it enabled her to draw out strengths in the mother that she was assessing as she had experienced of being parented by her mother who was effectively a lone parent. She stated the mother she was assessing:

“never wavered in her commitment to the children seeing them all the time. Doing her best for them and things. So difficult and challenging.”

She was able to recognise the similarities between her own mother and this mother. Her experiences gave her some way of connecting and engaging this mother:

“Well yes in many ways. She was similar to my own mother in many qualities sort of being steadfast, you know, putting the needs of her children first and however much difficult circumstances she finds herself in. She never let that interfere with her seeing the children, having contact and things like that. So it did work out very well for her. That they were able to come back to her and the transformation for these children. I saw them in the foster home you know, a nice big house in North London. And foster carers, grandmotherly figure. She has grown up children who visit. They were all over the place the two of them. But the minute that I saw them at home on a contact visit. I went on a Sunday or Saturday. They were totally different. Mother had you know a very small attic flat. They were very much able to listen to mother.”

6.8 Relationship with their mothers and view of their fathers

Andy, Chris and Eve had particular experiences of their mothers and feelings towards their mothers.

Andy described the violence towards his mother from his father. He explained how his father

“calmed down a lot and somehow has resolved some of the issues.” However, he felt that

his mother could have done better. In his words:

“I think my mum would have been probably much better position if she was not married to him. She would have been much freer much happier person. She chose to remain and that was her choice. I think it has worked for them, but she would probably have been happier.”

He linked his own experiences to the family that he was assessing. He felt there was a link.

“There was the two of them, but the whole attitude of we are remaining together. The whole thing of they are not going to divorce or separate and what children meant and that kind of thing”.

Chris also had some empathy as Andy did towards his mother as to how much his mother had suffered. Both felt that if it was not for them (their children) their mother’s would have met someone better.

In his words:

“My mother was ostracised; I don’t think she would have been with my step father if she did not have a half caste child. She would have waited for someone else.”

6.9 Negotiation of conflict

Conflict has been a significant theme in this research. The different independent social work experts have had a different way of negotiating and resolving conflict. For Andy there appeared to be very little conflict with Bernice. He appears to have said very little when he has had concerns. For example, he felt it was racist when there was no interpreter for a period of time. Andy does not appear to have said anything about this and continued with the assessment. It meant that the parents had limited communication with the children during this period when there was no interpreter. Both Andy and Bernice appeared to have the same approach and understanding of the parents that were being assessed. Andy was known to Bernice and this made it easier for them to negotiate conflict.

Chris was upset and puzzled over why he had been repeatedly asked to reassess the father. The conflictual situation between him and the Children's Guardian reached a point where he felt angry. In his words:

"I just want to fucking get her. I was going to get her. I do not mean a physically beating. I was going to look right at your face when I am giving my evidence."

He was upset that she did not return his telephone calls. He also could not understand why she did not see the father with the child. In his words:

"I make more of a fact that she never ever returned a phone call. I spoke to her solicitor once or twice about speaking to her. I make more of that. And then I don't know why this Guardian has not seen him with the child. She must have been on the case for 18 months and she has not seen him with the child. I was really quite cross with her. I think I need to say I am not one for accusing someone of being racist and it is the worst thing you can say to somebody. If you are going to say that to somebody you had better mean it. I just thought I know if it was racial anxiety, maybe she was genuinely concerned about this child. You know what I mean, but she just did not trust him. I think because he was a Muslim man."

In respect of Eve, she was instructed quite late in the court proceedings and the conflict between the Children's Guardian and the Local Authority was very clear. Eve was brought in for her expertise. She was known to Jane. It appears that they never spoke after her instruction and they never held a professional discussion or meeting. Jane was worried that

Eve had concentrated on the here and now and there were gaps in her assessment. Eve did not meet the extended family and it was not clear who mother's support networks were. Eve on the other hand felt the mother had addressed the concerns. There was an improved relationship between the children and mother (2.53). The mother was more emotionally responsive and Eve had observed this. Eve felt her knowledge of parents from South East Asia, particularly China assisted her in formulating her assessment. (2.56).

It appeared unfortunate as in the situation between Chris and the Children's Guardian, there was no direct discussion about the case to assist in resolving the conflict. Whereas between Andy and Bernice they already knew each other and there was some trust between them. They both appeared to hold the same values and beliefs in respect of the parents and children.

Chris wanted a discussion and was willing to hold a discussion with the Children's Guardian, however the Children's Guardian was not available. In the case of Eve and Jane. It appears that Jane wanted Eve to undertake the assessment and in the end there was a difference of opinion. But Jane indicated that she accepted Eve's assessment. She explained (2.61) that there had been a breakdown between her and the mother and she accepted the assessment and it was the

Judge's role to look at the information. Jane waited for the tape recorder to go off and she revealed her fears of being called a racist and her experience of the collusion between black students and families (2.62).

It appears the theme of racism, and a different approach to assessing ethnic minority families was factor that applied to both Chris and Eve. Both independent social work experts managed to engage the parent, whereas the Children's Guardians in both cases had experienced a breakdown with the parent.

In terms of their respective biographies, both Eve and Andy appeared to have kept a lid on any difficulties or issues with their parents. They both approached their work in a matter of fact and an objective way. Whereas, Chris was quite vocal about who he was and his experiences. Unlike, Eve and Andy, he was asked to repeat his assessments a number of times and he tried to communicate with the Children's Guardian, but she would not return his calls. It appears this lack of communication fuelled the conflictual situation.

6.10 Strengths and vulnerabilities.

When the independent social work experts presented their respective assessments. They did not appear to make the connection between the assessment they presented and the parallels and the similarities to their own birth families. It was through the free association and the information that they provided that themes and connections were made. It appears as the independent social work experts gave more information about themselves and their parents and experiences within their own families that connection and links were made with the assessments.

Each independent social work expert revealed some trauma in their early lives. An understanding of this trauma helped them to form a connection and understanding of the assessment that they were presenting.

Andy had experience of being brought up in a household where there was domestic violence. He revealed that it had affected his siblings and his mother remained in a relationship which she was unable to leave. He felt that his mother could do better. He was able to empathise with children in these situations. Andy also grew up in apartheid South Africa. He recognised the racism in his own family and how different groups were treated. He had some understanding of racism and discrimination.

Chris grew up as a dual heritage child in a white/British family. He was aware that his mother had a relationship with his father and his father left his mother. He was aware of his mother's

suffering and his own suffering as a child and young person as he looked different from his siblings. He, like Andy felt his mother could have made a better choice of husband. As he was growing up Chris discriminated against Pakistanis taking out his anger and frustration. However, as an adult he sought out black friends and he was more aware of racism. He was also rejected by his Black father, but finding him as adult answered some of his questions. He also viewed fathers that wanted to parent their children as something positive.

Eve was brought up in Hong Kong. Her father had an affair leaving her mother to care for her and her sister. Eve recalled an incident when she was taken by her mother to public place to confront her father and his mistress. Eve explained that she made a conscious choice to marry a certain type of man and she brought up her son to have certain characteristics. Her experience of being brought up by her mother made her view single mothers with some sympathy.

I would say all of these experiences if they were unprocessed and the practitioner was not aware of the impact on them could be a vulnerability. Again the work of Cooper (2017 forthcoming) is very relevant has highlighted a number of factors to think about. In particular the” psycho-social ‘capacities of mind’. I would say the independent social work expert needs to find an understanding of their own experiences and have ability to think and process these in way so that they do not impact or cloud their judgement in respect of the family they are assessing. However, they are not working in isolation so if there are other professionals that have not processed or checked their anxieties on a personal and organisational level this will impact on their ability to function and make judgements.

6.11 Summary

It appears from the assessments presented by the independent social work experts, they were motivated by their own personal experiences with their own parents and families. Their unique experiences with their birth parent(s) **along with** unresolved traumatic, painful

experiences with their parents appeared to sensitise them to the particular difficult issues, they presented in the assessments. Andy had the experience of the impact of domestic violence on him and his siblings as he was growing up. He also thought about racism living in South Africa at the time of apartheid. Chris could relate to dual heritage children who were unclear of their own identities and difficulties between the parents. He was sensitive to the experiences of his mother and the rejection of his black father. He was impressed by the black father, he assessed who wanted to parent his daughter.

Eve experienced her mother confront her father about his affair. She was brought up by her mother supported by a nanny and this was a positive experience for her. She formed a certain position in respect of men. This influenced her choice of partner and how she brought up her son. These experiences are a source of strength, if the practitioner is aware of them and how they have impacted on them and affected their assessments and conclusions. However, if they are unprocessed and the practitioner is not aware it will impact on the judgements and the recommendations that they make. It will also impact on the ability to resolve conflict. It appears that the independent social work experts did not fully understand these early traumas until the second meeting and they were able to make links with the assessment that they presented and aspects of their own biography. I will now move to explore to discuss the findings from this research and link this to some of the relevant literature.

Chapter 7 The findings.

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I consider the findings of this research. I outline the main themes from the research. I explore the impact of the work on the independent social work experts (assessing black and ethnic minority families with a number of complex factors). I also consider the organisational factors causing anxiety to the commissioners, and how the commissioners outsource their anxiety to the independent social work experts.

The significance of the independent social work experts' biographical material in shaping their capacities to do the work is considered, alongside the influence of conscious and unconscious processes in the assessments of families. In addition to this there are implications for models and approaches to supervision of social work practitioners. I will also be linking the literature that assists in the process of reflection, and the space to think.

Finally, I introduce the importance of intersectionality', to think about how family/emotional/biographical factors are interacting with the dynamics of race/ethnicity. I will think about the anxieties created by all of these factors for both for the commissioners and independent social work experts that merge together to create a complex psycho-social knot.

7.2. The main themes.

It has emerged from the themes that there are a number of factors that have made the assessments of black and ethnic minority families particularly challenging. I refer

to chapter 5, 5.6. I have not referred to all the themes as they are clearly laid out in chapter 5.

I have picked out the main themes which have featured in all the assessments. They are:

- child abuse (emotional, physical, sexual and neglect) □ Poor housing/homelessness.
- Poverty
- Domestic violence
- Language issues
- Race
- Racism
- Cultural issues
- Immigration
- Religion.

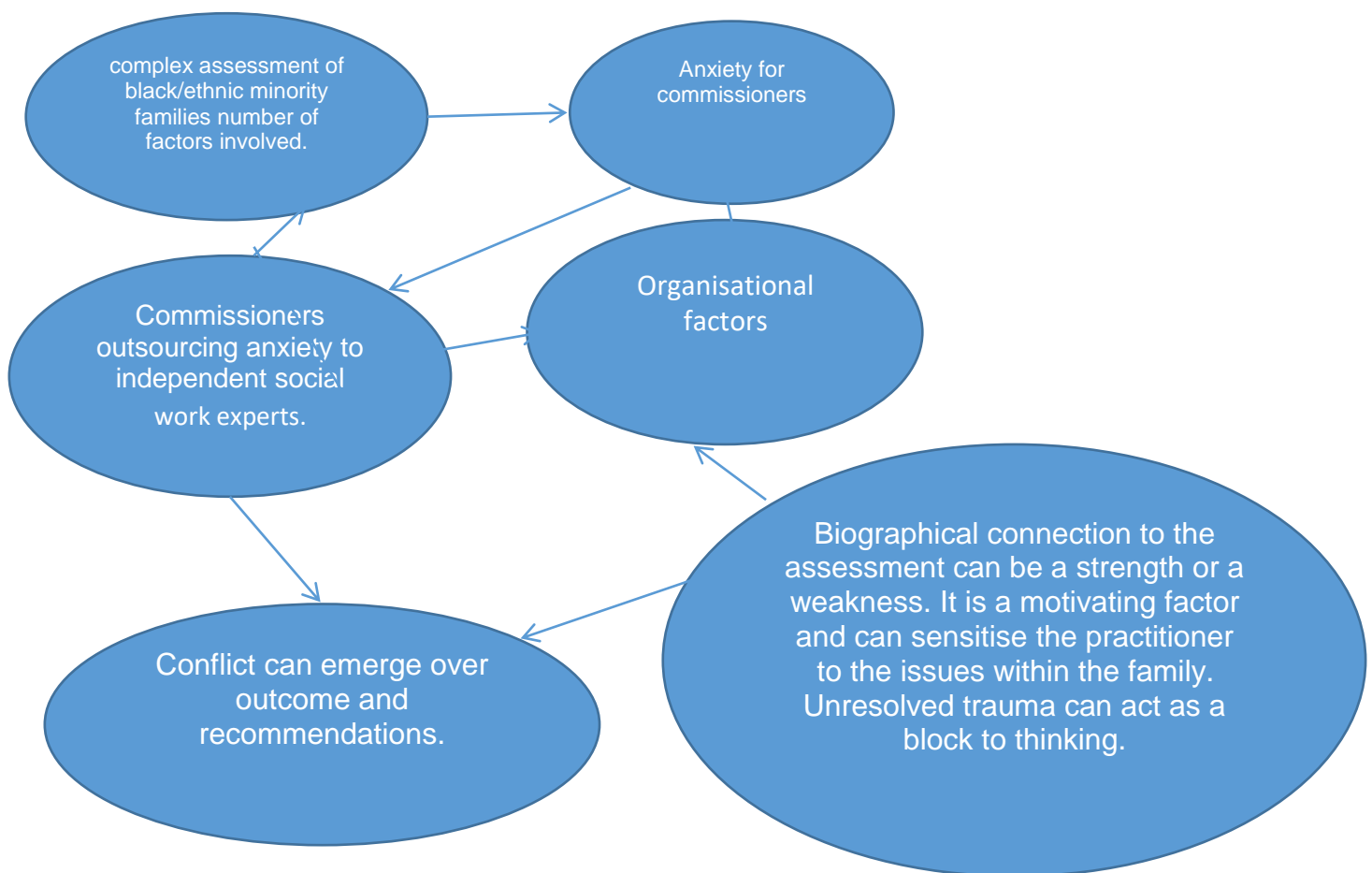
All of these featured in the assessments presented. Secondly, combined with these factors were the anxieties from the organisation which can be summarised as:

- lack of resources.
- Time pressure on the allocated social worker(Davina).
- In some cases, there were political issues, impact of the community, the involvement of religious groups, advocates for the families from the community(Bernice) concerns around Islamophobia and racism(Davina).
- A breakdown between the parent and commissioner, language and cultural issues(Jane).

7.2 Outsourcing anxiety.

One way of outsourcing this anxiety was the instruction of the independent social work expert. I refer to diagram 1.

Diagram 1 Exploring how the assessment of complex black/ethnic families present an anxiety for the commissioner which is outsourced to the independent social work expert.



The independent social work expert was instructed on the basis of their expertise. Andy had previously assessed “Asian” families for the commissioner. There were issues of domestic violence and the commissioner required a male independent social work expert. Chris had an expertise with dual heritage children and he was a qualified psychotherapist. Eve had expertise with families from South East Asia. Due to her unique background, she had an understanding of issues facing families from South East Asia (China in particular) and she had a good knowledge/experience of British culture and lifestyle. This study shows that the independent social work experts came with their own unique biographies. I refer to chapter

6 and I have summarised the significant aspects of their biographies in table 2.

Table 2. Summary of the biographies of Chris, Eve and Andy.

Chris a dual heritage man who was abandoned by his black father. He felt isolation as a child brought up by white/British mother within a white/British community. He held racist views as a child towards Pakistanis. He felt and looked different as a child from his half siblings. As an adult he sought out members of the black community and also found his father who rejected him. Although a painful and hurtful experience. He felt it enabled him to find the missing piece of the jigsaw. He was able to value fathers who wanted to parent their children. He has engaged in individual psychotherapy, group therapy. He is an expert in assessing dual heritage children.

Eve migrated from Hong Kong. She described a colonial influence on her upbringing. Her father had an affair and her mother brought her up with her sister as a lone parent. She formed a position in respect of the role of the mother and father based on her experiences. She chose to marry a white/British man and to bring up her son holding certain values such as treating women as an equal. She developed an expertise in assessing Chinese families and was able to speak Mandarin. She worked closely with a well know Chinese Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist.

Andy born in South Africa. He had an awareness of apartheid and formed a view in respect of racism which stood him apart from other family members. His father was violent to his mother and this impacted on his older siblings. He managed to escape. He moved into independent social work. He was able to emphasise and understand children whose parents are violent. He expressed difficulties in respect of paying for therapy. He raised conventional supervision which does not offer a space to speak about unresolved trauma from child hood. He showed a real commitment in exploring this further.

I have explained in chapter 6, how the biographies have motivated the independent social work experts and sensitised them to the issues for the parents(families) they have assessed. However, it appears for all the independent social work experts there has been some unresolved early child hood trauma. This appeared to remain unresolved, until they were helped to make a link with the assessment that they were presenting in the second or third meeting (for Andy it was the third meeting).

The anxiety of the commissioner is outsourced to the independent social worker. The biographies of the independent social work experts will sensitise them to issues in certain families that link them with their own birth families. These can be a strength and weakness, particularly if the independent social work expert has not brought to the conscious any trauma, significant upset or unresolved issue from the past and has managed to make links, process or understand these earlier experiences. This can affect how conflict is negotiated with the commissioner and the parent. I have summarised this in diagram 1.

7.3 Anxiety and negotiation of conflict.

It is clear from this research the types of families/parent(s) that have been assessed have provoked anxiety both for the commissioner and independent social work expert and this can act as a block to thinking. It is therefore important to have a space to think and reflect to help manage and contain the anxieties. This is also important in helping to negotiate conflict in a constructive manner.

7.4 A summary of the conflict.

This is discussed in chapter 2, paragraphs 2.17, 2.37, 2.54, 2.61, 2.69 and in chapter 5 section C, paragraph 5.9. Andy and Bernice appeared to share the same views of the family being assessed and there appeared to be little or no conflict. However, Andy revealed he was worried about whether he could survive financially as a social work expert and he had secured a loan from his bank. This may have placed him in a vulnerable situation and it was not in his interests to raise issues that may impact on his relationship with the commissioner. He may have feared that he may not be paid. He raised how he felt it was racist not to use an interpreter. It appears that he did not say anything to Bernice the Commissioner. In the background it appeared from the interviews there was pressure from the community for example the parents had elicited the support of a priest and the interpreters were colluding with the parents as they were from the same community as the parents.

Chris and Davina also appeared not have much conflict. Both had a positive view of the father. The conflict was more with the Children's Guardian who appeared to have a different view of the father. Chris raised the main issue for him was the lack of communication between him and the Children's Guardian, despite his attempts to contact her to discuss the case. It reached a point where he felt very angry and

undermined. Chris was asked to repeat his assessment and he stated he came up with the same conclusion.

Eve and Jane also had a conflictual relationship, they came up with a different assessment of the mother and a difference over the concept of emotional warmth and whether or not the mother was abusive towards her children. In the end Jane accepted Eve's assessment, but it appears a doubt remained and she revealed when she taught social work she felt some of her black students colluded with black families that they were assessing. Eve revealed from her own biography she was able to understand the mother she was assessing as there appeared to be similarities to her own mother.

7.5 Thinking about the literature.

It is clear from this analysis of conflict from the interviews with the participants the whole area of conflict is complex. Examining the literature in respect of conflict and anxiety also reveals how complex the whole area is. The following authors have written about the management of conflict and anxiety. Bion (1962), Bower (2005), Cooper (2010) Howe

(1995), Menzies-Lyth (1988), Foster (2017), Ruch (2010), Shemmings and Shemmings (2011). I refer to chapter 3 paragraphs 3.27 to 3.31.

The literature in respect of supervision, containment and reflection is also a multifaceted area and there is extensive literature. I refer to chapter 3 paragraphs 3.28- 3.30. Foster (2017) highlights the importance of containment and the containment from the supervisor is akin to the maternal role. Others such as Okitikpi and Aymer (2008) have raised the importance of emotional intelligence, (Fonagy 1991) the importance of mentalisation. The use of theoretical frameworks is important and a number of authors have discussed cross-cultural work using anti-

discriminatory/anti-racist and anti-oppressive frameworks namely Abbas (2004), Brooks (2014), Cooper (2005,), Cooper (2017 forthcoming), Davids (2011), Penketh and Lavalette (2014), Lowe (2014), Okitikpi and Aymer (2010).

There are a number of authors that have focused more on radical social work, emphasizing the political edge to the work. There is a focus on combatting anti-oppressive practice, racism and oppression. There is also an importance in working with differences, considering the strengths from communities and individuals I refer to the work of Barn (1993), Penketh (2014), Singh (2014) amongst others. There is also psychoanalytical research in this area from Britt-Krause (2002), Fanon (1967:1970), Lowe (2008:14), Davids (2011) and Dalal (2006) and Cooper (2017 forthcoming).

There is other research that has considered the dynamics of what may go on in reflection and supervision, such as the creation of space to explore the impact of these forces/emotional intensity of the work. Anane-Agyei (2002), Lowe (2014). Ward considers the use of the self in social work (Ward 2010). Cooper (2017 forthcoming) has highlighted the importance of thinking about the psycho-social capacities of mind.

Houston (2015), mentions five domains relationship, psychobiography, culture, politics/economy and the organisation. He links the five domains and considers how they can be used as a part of a reflexive process to enable others in social work. He outlines five stages, reflecting on self, reflecting on the enabling process, reflecting on the service user's experience, reflecting on social work practice and final reflection-bringing it all together. Houston introduces the notion of the practitioner's biography.

In this study, I have considered the influence of the practitioner's biography on how assessments are undertaken at a much deeper level. This leads on to the key findings in this study.

7.6 The key finding of this study.

This study shows that there are conscious and unconscious processes influencing independent social work expert's approach. This is influenced by their unique personal experiences and relationships with their parents (primary carers) and their families of origin. I refer to this as the biographical connection. (Chapter 6).

The manner in which the assessment was presented by the Independent social work expert indicated they were influenced by unresolved issues from their background. In essence what has emerged is the significance of the independent social work expert's biographical material (the biographical connection) in shaping their capacity to do the in-depth work sensitively and possibly also in creating blind spots for them.

7.7 Summary and the Implication of the findings for social work practice?

The first implication is if there is no understanding of one's biographical connection and blind spots. This could have a significant effect on the outcome of the assessment. It is therefore essential for a practitioner to be able to think about their biographical connection to any assessment they are undertaking. This applies to all social work practice, not just assessments involving black and ethnic minority families.

The second implication is for the models of supervision within social work. I propose a model that gives recognition to the impact of conscious and especially unconscious influences of a practitioner's biographical material on the assessment that is being undertaken. In my opinion, If this does not happen, there will be a shortfall in reflective

practice. Also the possible blind spots from the 'biographical connection', may impact and influence the outcome of the assessment.

Thirdly, in evaluating the current models and approaches to the supervision of social work practitioners, and reflective practice, the depth I am talking about appears to be missing in the literature I have considered on reflective practice. I refer to the literature in Chapter 3, 3.13 to 3.31. There is nothing in this literature that gives the same emphasis to the exploration of the biographical aspects of the practitioner (the biographical connection) and how this impacts both consciously and unconsciously on how assessments are undertaken and the subsequent outcome of those assessments.

7.8 Intersectionality.

Fourthly, I would like to mention Intersectionality as it appears relevant. The Intersectionality theory originates from feminist sociological research, and it was first highlighted by Crenshaw (1989). Intersectional approaches recognise there were essential differences between men and women rather than simply between them. Gender, race and class are interconnected as Intersecting oppressions. It is a methodology of studying;

"the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities social relationships and subject formations". McCall (2005).

The relevance of Intersectionality for this study is that it considers how family/emotional/biographical factors are interacting with the dynamics of race and ethnicity. The inter-relationship between all these factors in the assessments that have been presented appears to have produced a complex psycho-social knot for both the commissioners and independent social work experts.

I raise the real need to think about this complex psycho-social knot in supervision. So there can be some reflection and discussion to enable justice to be done to the families and children that are being assessed. As stated a number of times, I would say all the

independent social work experts have presented assessments, where they have agonised over a number of issues that have linked them back to a relationship with one or both of their parents. For all of them Intersectionality has been highly relevant and important. Again, I refer back to Chapter 6 The biographical connection, paragraph 7.2 and table 1 and 2. I.

The implications for current social work supervision and reflection.

Finally, from this study it appears the kind of supervision that may be useful to current social work practice is a form of psychoanalytic supervision, or supervision that requires the practitioner to have been in counselling/ psychotherapy themselves. Sudbury (2002) has highlighted how a social worker's use of relationship and psychodynamic insights can assist the social worker to be of maximum helpfulness in the work they undertake. He highlights the importance of social workers themselves receiving therapeutic support, and this should not be seen as a sign of "weakness, inadequacy or pathology". (p.13) He points out that counsellors and therapists receive therapy as a part of their training, but social workers are not encouraged to do this. This is despite social workers having to work with some very tough and challenging people in a variety of settings. He argues that counsellors and therapists receive therapy as part of their training, but the attitude appears very different for social workers who deal with very difficult, troubled and disturbed individuals. He points to the real need for psychoanalytical supervision and he refers to previous research by Beistek (1961), Woods and Hollis (1964/1991), Howe and Hinings (1995), Salzberger- Wittenberg (1970) and McCluskey and Cooper (2000).

My research has revealed there is as much need as there ever was for psychoanalytical supervision and therapy for social workers. It appears this has slipped off the

requirements for social work training. This includes the social work training at the Tavistock Clinic.

I would strongly argue for a model of social work supervision that allows the practitioner to think about the Biographical Connection and the conscious and unconscious processes which impact on the work. I will now move to discuss the conclusions and the way forward in the final chapter 8.

8. Chapter 8

8.1 Conclusions and way forward

Although, this study involves a small sample, (three independent social work experts, three commissioners, one parent (I was unable to locate the other parents for a variety of reasons which I have explained in chapter 2 table 1) and one specialist team, which provides an independent expert witness service. It appears from the assessments presented by the independent social work experts that they all selected an assessment that had an impact on them or troubled them in some way. Although, they were not aware of this when the assessment was presented to me. It was through the process of feeling contained they were able to reflect and make some links between the material presented and their relationship with their primary carer(s). The initial anxieties they felt appeared to reduce when they were able to make some links between the issues that had troubled them and understanding of earlier experiences which had left a lasting impression. This is perceived as a strength as opposed to a weakness and certainly Chris, Eve and Ivy have all embarked on ways of looking after themselves and creating spaces where they were able to think and reflect. Andy also recognised in the third meeting, he was not receiving supervision where he had been able to discuss his background and experiences with his parents. He identified this as an area that he needed to explore further.

8.2 Unresolved early trauma can act as a weakness.

The important point is that the unresolved early trauma with one's birth parents/primary carers can act as a weakness that can be "acted out" in assessments with vulnerable parents and children. Hence, the need to understand one self and be able to make links between one's own material (the biographical connection) and how it may impact

on the families that are being assessed. Okitikpi and Aymer (2010) suggest anti-discriminatory practice involves reflection and thinking.

All the independent social work experts spoke about the pain of racism and anti-racist social work. They all thought about working cross-culturally, the importance of language. Also developing an understanding of adults that have come from different parts of the world and how to assess these adults in a humane way, but at the same time ensuring that there was no risk to the child(ren) at the centre of the assessment.

8.3 Difficulties of implementing anti-racist social work practice.

This study has revealed that it remains difficult to operate anti-racist social work and those uniquely placed to undertake such assessments with many years of experience and qualifications (all the independent social work experts were highly trained and experienced) will be challenged at times. Chris spoke about how he was asked to repeat his assessment a number of times. Eve spoke about the complete break down between her and the Children's Guardian who had pushed for her instruction. Ivy spoke about the pain of being called a support worker in a professionals meeting. She believed she and her Manager were referred to as support workers, because they are black African women. The experiences of these practitioners mirrors the research and studies of many others who have worked and continue to work in social work and related areas (psychotherapy, sociology, psychiatry, psychology, psychiatry and family therapy amongst others). I refer to the literature review (paragraphs 3.6 to 3.31). One point of particular relevance has been some psychoanalytical research has identified that it is not just individual psychology, but also a sophisticated link between the individual and society. The work of Britt- Krause (2014), Davids (2011, p142), Lowe

(2014) and Cooper (2017, chapter 15 forthcoming) come to mind. In the words of Lowe (p226) when describing the riots in August 2011. He states:

“describing the riots as a medical or criminal condition reinforces notions of a pathological and deviant underclass and not only downplays that social and structural factors influence the development and course of disaffection”.

It appears from this study and previous studies that racism continues to exist and there remains a real need for anti-racist social work. It is my assessment that it is complex and evolving area.

In the words of Gurnam Singh (2014, p. 29):

“on the surface the social work profession appears a beacon of light when it comes to ethnic diversity and equality”.

The profession has changed from being an almost white profession in the mid-1970s to one that has many black and ethnic minority workers. However, the racism that exists is more complex and subtle. For example, the rise of Islamophobia (Chris and Andy speak of racism towards Muslims in the assessments that they have presented). There is recent research in this area. Tahir Abbas (2017) has written about the “Trojan Horse” plot in schools in Birmingham. The “Trojan horse plot” refers to allegations that Muslim pupils attending a number of inner city schools in Birmingham were being Islamised.

He states (p.12) that the “investigations were slapdash, presumptuous, weak, and in many cases simply wrong.” He also adds:

“the impact that it has had on Muslim communities in the inner city areas, however, will have much longer effect, including furthering Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism.”

Chris has raised the notion of demonising Muslim men. Chris was tested and challenged a number of times by the Children’s Guardian who managed to gain the instruction of a further expert to test and challenge Chris’s assessments. There is

research on street grooming Orr (2014, p.195) refers to how it has become a racialized crime perpetuated by gangs of Pakistani men. This reflects the racist myths about sexually aggressive black men. Due to the complexities of the assessments discussed in this thesis. They all involve risks to children and whether the children are safe with their parents and the associated anxieties relating to this work on an individual and organisational level, prompted by a number of high profile child deaths. It is imperative that the key assessments (such as the ones described in this research) are undertaken by experienced, highly skilled practitioners who know themselves, who they are and have fully processed their earlier experiences with their parents (primary carers) and are aware of their blind spots. It is my assessment in assessments involving black and ethnic minority children and families the expert social work experts should if possible be from similar communities. The ability to understand the impact of racism and discrimination at all levels is very important.

Chris mentioned in the first interview with him that there was laziness when it comes to assessing black and ethnic minority families. I would agree with this comment. I would suggest that often corners are cut (for example Andy had to observe and assess contact without an interpreter). Ivy spoke about how the project she works for was not utilised often enough. The work of Onel Brooks (2014, p.35) come to mind again; situations present themselves where race, racism should be thought about and considered, but for some reason opportunities are either evaded, declined or not accepted. I think an important aspect to this process is finding and locating spaces for reflection, process and thinking about one's work in a containing nurturing environment where practitioners can be honest and reflective about their practice. It is my assessment that the location of this space needs to be right and comfortable for

the practitioner concerned as they need to be able to open up, reflect and think. They need to feel safe to be able to do this.

This is important as assessments of risk combined with working with different children and families from black and ethnic minority families who may have come from other parts of the world can be particularly difficult and challenging.

8.5 The ability to step back, adopt a third position and be aware of one's own blind spots is crucial.

In respect of myself as a researcher and independent social work expert this study has allowed me the space to think and reflect. I have found some of the discussions about race and racism with my supervisors to be difficult and painful at times. However, through the experience I have learnt more about myself, my own life experiences and my relationship with my parents. I have actually sat down and spoke to my parents about some of the early experiences that have bothered me. I would say I have become closer to my parents. I have also thought about some of the assessments that I have undertaken that have bothered me. The words of Chris come to mind when he felt upset that he had been unable to talk to the Children's Guardian. I would agree with him the situations where I have felt particularly upset and angry have been when I have been unable to sit down and have a professional's meetings. I can think of two complex assessments when this request was made and it was the Judges that refused to allow this to take place and also the Children's Guardian's did not want to do this. These meetings would have been formal and minutes taken, but for some reason there was a complete refusal to have a discussion about some complex issues when I was probably the only professional that has spent hours assessing the parents. It is this complete refusal to have a professional discussion that has really perplexed me and it cannot be in the interests of the child(ren) at the centre of the assessment.

However, my experience as a researcher in this study has been the space for the participants to discuss and think about their views and feelings has been very important and crucial. I in turn had this space with my supervisors and colleagues on the course.

This has helped me to reflect and think about my own personal development and challenges that I have faced as a researcher and independent social work expert. I have realised and understood that there is a political context to some of the assessments I have undertaken in the court arena. Currently there is a drive to complete court based assessments within 26 weeks. This is very difficult when assessing families that live overseas. I have already mentioned a couple of cases where I felt challenged. A mother who I assessed in Pakistan, a positive assessment, but no video link was set up for her to give evidence. This meant the Judge was unable to hear her give evidence and cross examination. A radicalisation case where I was appointed late (about a year into the proceedings). I was not allowed to view the police material despite four requests. I was not aware of the dynamics in the case and I was informed the family wanted me to work with them. The Local Authority were unhappy that the family was prepared to work myself and not them. I requested a professionals meeting to allow a professional discussion about the family, but this did not take place. I now wonder on the radicalisation case whether the instruction of a Muslim independent social work expert was one that the court really wanted. Judgements and decisions had been made long before I came on the scene. The young person did return home and this was something I recommended. I felt that the family and young person were no risk. However, the family and young person lived in an area where other young people had travelled to Syria and during the time of the assessment there were bombs in

Paris and Brussels. I felt that this family and young person had to be made an example of (it did not help that they challenged the Local Authority). However, it remained my assessment that the crucial issues were the young person's relationship with her parents. But importantly it was my assessment and view that this young person was no risk to society or herself and had learnt her lesson. In retrospect, I also feel that the resources thrown at this family could have been utilised more appropriately in working with young people at risk or/ or have been radicalised. I recall during this assessment watching the channel 4 documentary called The Jihadists Next Door shown on Channel four and mentioning to the allocated social worker after a review meeting that some of people interviewed in this documentary should be getting attention and were far more disturbed than the young woman at the centre of this assessment. It was during this discussion, she informed me I had not been allowed to see the police material because I am a Muslim. She later denied this conversation. I unfortunately did not take it up at the time as I was shocked about what she had said to me. Over time I have been able to reflect on this case and I was glad the family were able to open to me and it was sad that there was no professionals meeting at the crucial time when it was required. The anxiety of terrorist activity around the world and the way the media portrayed these events during the time of this assessment did not help.

8.6 When the feed has not been good enough.

Turning now to some of the supervision I have received in the past. I have worked in a number of organisations in the past and I have thought about some of the supervision I have received. I have felt dissatisfied with the quality of the supervision as often it has been about work load and no space for reflection or thinking about practice. It appeared to me supervision was just taking place to say that it has taken place. I have been supervised in the past by some managers who have appeared burnt out and

exhausted with the number of tasks they have to undertake. I have been unclear as to the supervision and support they **were** receiving. I have certainly not found this type of space a place for thinking and reflection. However, at the same time I have received supervision from some excellent managers who have allowed time for thought and reflection. The move to independent social work allowed me to be more creative and imaginative in how I work. Further discussions with my supervisors has allowed me to think about this further.

I am aware I have focused on the nurturing space of supervision, which has been influenced by the type of cases presented and analysed in this study. A containing, reflective space appeared to assist in promoting good anti-racist social work practice. However, there is another dimension which I would like to think about.

I would call this the psychoanalytic notions of the “good feed” which is like good interpretation. I am aware the feed can be more complicated. It can be conflictual, frustrating and result in stomach pains. When we are offered food, it is at this point we realise how hungry, empty and needy (ignorant and unknowing) we are. It is also possible at this point to think about how badly we have been fed from birth. We therefore crave for junk food, an unhealthy diet such as the equivalent of burger and chips, a really fast tabloid sound bite diet, taking this to be real food superior to “foreign rubbish”, because this is what we are used to. In other words, reflection might be and perhaps must be experienced as potentially unsettling, disruptive and dangerous, exposing us to many things that we are usually on the run from. During the interviews the participants used the space offered during the interviews to think and reflect. However, this was far from easy, Andy requested a third meeting to talk about other matters he wanted to share. Chris revealed how he had been racist as a child towards “Asians referring to them as Pakis”. I was aware revealing personal and difficult material caused anxiety to the participants of this research. There is another side to

reflection that comes to mind. This is sometimes one can feel empty, hungry without inner resources and one is desperate for a sense of what is right, sure and certain. The experience of supervision and reflection as being nurturing and supportive is not always the case. This type of experience may make it difficult to think and thinking is evaded. For example, in terms of diet, we might know that our diet of burger and chips might be killing us, but we love it. We want fast food as this is exactly what we are used to. We may not want to try, taste and chew slowly on what we are not used to, what we feel unknown. So the space for reflection and thinking may not be what we are used to and it may be perceived as something that is difficult and challenging. It can leave a bad taste and pains in one's stomach. I have always relished and valued the place to think. For myself the ideal space for me to think and reflect occurs in a space where I feel there are clear boundaries, a supervisor who understands racism and trust can develop. I have paid for my own supervision and consultation as it enables me to choose someone who can understand the principles of anti-social work practice. I have found this easier to access in the role of an independent social work expert.

In this study it appears the participants responded to the space offered in the research interviews. It appears the space with a skilled supervisor can allow for open discussion, reflection and an analysis of all risk factors including examining, race, culture, language and the impact of racism on the families (parents and children) that may be the subject of the assessment. It is also helpful for the practitioner to be able to make links with their childhood and experiences of being parented. This will consider conscious and unconscious processes. However, for the space to be promoted it needs to be recognised at an individual and organisational level. **I felt in this study** the independent social work experts appeared to recognise this. Although, it took the second/third interview for the links to be made so it is clear that time and space with containment is required for real thinking and reflection to

take place. This study has made me think about myself and my practice as a researcher and independent social work expert.

Finally, it is very clear to me from this research that reflective social work supervision should be of a psychoanalytical reflective type supervision and it is important for social work practitioners to have received therapy/counselling. I think it is important to return to a model of social work training that incorporates psychoanalytical reflective supervision and a requirement of therapy/counselling into the training. This in my opinion will achieve better outcomes for families, child and adults that receive support, assessments and the full range of services and interventions from social work practitioners. It will also hopefully provide social work practitioners and social work managers (at all levels) the good feed they require to undertake very difficult and at times painful work.

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My interview appendix 1

Preliminary anxieties.

I guess if I am honest I was very wary of this interview and where it would take me. I guess this is how the participants of this research must have felt. However, I liked my fellow researcher Ranjit. She was very friendly and kind. Due to my initial nervousness I informed her of my nervousness. She was fine with this. I warmed to her very quickly and was able to develop a relationship whereby I felt comfortable and she appeared interested in my story. It also gave a chance to think about myself. Due the process I wanted to ask her questions but I resisted. There was also a great deal to say.

The question she posed to me was as follows

I am interested in the assessments and why you do them and what do you get from them?

My response was as follows:

“Ok I think in my family. I have always been a social worker.

As a child and young person I was very aware that we were different. My parents chose always to live in areas that were predominately white for some reason. I could not understand this at the time and I felt that it made us isolated and it was probably feelings of isolation that led me eventually to choose to live within the “Asian” community(I currently live in an area and have done for the last 21 years which was predominantly Asian but in the last few years people from Eastern Europe, Middle East and North African have moved in but the core

group is probably still Asian consisting of Indians, Pakistanis that have migrated from Pakistan, India and East Africa).

I chose to work with my own community which is the work I am doing now in terms of the independent assessments that I undertake. Although I also work cross culturally and I also assess white/British/ European parents and children. I think my parents experienced some form of abuse in Pakistan which they have found difficult to describe and this was the root cause for them to live away from their own community. Although over recent years they appeared to have made peace with this and bridges have been built. Although I cannot say that I can completely understand what occurred. My visits to Pakistan helped me to understand the complexities of different parts of Pakistan.

Education became very important to me and this was instilled in me from an early age that Education was a way of getting out of situation and making changes. The pursuit of education and knowledge was very important for me.

I think I have spent all of my life in some form of education and learning and developing is very important for me. As a child It was also a way of taking my mind off the struggles of my parents. Teachers at school became role models and parental figures and they were a very important in my development. Hence now I view schools as very important places to engage children and also to find out more about children.

Although my parents were very supportive in encouraging me to pursue education and go to university there was also a price to pay. Some relatives did not think I should go away to University. The time I went to University very few Muslim women were going to University. Also I lived away from home. The first year of University was difficult for me but I think I made the right choice in going

to the University of Leicester as I grew to love Leicester and I made good friends. Also some of lecturers and teachers at the University were wonderful. On a personal level there was a struggle for me as a young woman and I did feel torn between the role of a dutiful daughter and being independent. I felt I was being selfish in some ways. I was very aware of my feelings as a child, adolescent and young woman. Those feelings of being a child, adolescent and young person have remained with me and hence I think I am very good at relating to children, young people and working with them. There was a period when I did find it difficult and I was in therapy for about 4 years with a black male psychotherapist. The reason for the therapy was because I felt that there was something that was stopping me from developing my potential and I had become stuck. Therapy helped me to work out my blind spots and to be free from negative feelings that were preventing me from developing and being happy. But being in therapy with the right person was important that is why I believe in therapeutic work, but the person has to be right for the work to be effective and I also apply this to undertaking social work assessments. It is very important for children and families to have the right person assessing them so that they can make the connections and help people to open up and speak about their stories and narratives. It is also important to the person undertaking the assessment that they are aware of their blind spots.

Cross cultural work and working with different communities and thinking about diversity and difference have been with me from an early age. I thought about why my parents had chosen to live in white communities. We were different but we also made friends but we also suffered racism. One example was when my father brought a post office in very working class white area and one day he got to work and the outside shutters were covered with dog faeces which he had to

clean before he could open up. Yet, after about a year or two he was absolutely loved by the same white people that had probably covered the shutters with faeces. I was amazed at my parent's resilience and how they managed to carry on despite this violation and abuse. It made me feel sad and upset for them. It still does and it is this real pain of racism that makes me so committed in a way to work with black and ethnic minority communities because I understand what it is being subjected to racism and not being accepted. At the same time, I also have many positives and rewarding experiences with white people. Most of my friends at school were white as I was for a long time the only Pakistani (Asian child) in the school. I was very popular at school with most of my teachers and school and school became my second home in a way. I felt very secure and safe at school. I had a nice group of friends and I felt loved by my teachers and I had mutual feelings towards my teachers and there was a range of teachers. One in particular was my Classical Studies teacher who had been to Oxford. She gave me some poetry books and I recall winning a competition where I had to recite a long poem. I went home one lunchtime and learnt off by heart and returned and recited correctly. I was able to buy some books with the prize money. I absolutely loved Classical studies, history, English and religious studies. Shakespeare in particular taught me about people. I was fascinated in how people behaved. My teachers became my surrogate parents. I remember the large part in my own life school actually played and the stable solid relationships with some of my teachers made up for what was at times lacking my parents as they were so preoccupied with their own struggles. As I pulled away from my parents I realised that they could work out their difficulties

without me. In other words, they did not need me and this was such a great relief as then allowed me to live my own life.

My trips to Pakistan as a child and young woman helped me to think. My first trip to Pakistan at the age of 11 years resulted in me moving from being mediocre at school to returning and becoming top of the class. Something completely shifted in me. I can remember it so vividly. That first trip made me think about myself and understand who I was in a way that I would never have found in this country. It was if I had found the missing part in a jigsaw puzzle. It was a strange and wonderful experience. I came back feeling a different person. I also was able to see where my parents came from and to try and understand their experiences. I always wondered how they could have got married so young. I was always interested in my father's story. I felt at times closer to my father because it was due to my father more than my mother that I found my way to University and my interest in Pakistan. I also remember it was also a struggle as he was so protective and women and girls should not do certain things so we had our moments of great tension and unease and I am aware that this can be acted out in my relationships with certain men who remind me of my father. I have spent time in therapy exploring this amongst other things. It is something I am aware of and understand in myself.

My parents were very keen for my older brother to qualify as a doctor. This is something that comes from coming from a developing country (although Pakistan is not a developing country now) where the death rate is high and medics are considered with so much respect.

Because of the passion from my parents to achieve this dream. The pressure was off me so I just carried on slowly. I used to work on the kitchen table whilst

my brother was given meals upstairs. I liked working with people around me so I did not mind so much. Also because there was no pressure on me it made it easier for me. I did well in my GSCES and A levels and I had three offers at different Universities to study Law. I recall the tutor who interviewed me for a place at Leicester University felt impressed with me. He actually fed this back. The only problem was that I did not really want to study law. My interest was more in history or English. These were my favourite subjects at School. History as I was interested in patterns that were repeated over time and also I was fascinated by some of the characters in history and English because I loved English literature and I had a passion for Shakespeare. I felt that he taught us all so much about human nature and human beings. I guess my interest in human beings, how they function and some of the mess we make of our lives and how we can help each other has always been an interest of mine and is probably what drew me to social work.

Although I initially did not enjoy studying Law. I enjoyed the final year and I thought about training as a solicitor. I managed to secure articles in several firms and I worked in a solicitor's office before going to train as a solicitor. It was this experience that made me decide not to pursue a career as a solicitor and I am very glad that I did not do this as my current work involves close contact with Solicitors and I know I would not have enjoyed that role. During period of work in the solicitor's office I came across Guardian Ad Litem and I decided that law was not for me and the role of the Guardian Ad Litem was more for me.

After this role I went up to set up an Asian women's refuge in London before I trained in social work. This opportunity gave me an opportunity to meet other

Asian women and I met some very interesting Asian women some of whom were writers. I found this post to be very creative and interesting and it made up for the isolation I felt as a young Pakistani woman growing in a predominately white part of Birmingham. The desire to train in Social Work and achieve a professional qualification was still there so I applied to study for a MA in social work at Nottingham University where Professor Olive Stevenson was the head of the school. The other attraction was that there was a student unit there so it meant a good learning opportunity with our own on site Practice teacher (now known as a Practice Educator).

It was through this course that themes of race and racism were more clearly defined and considered. The social work course at Nottingham University really took these issues very seriously. I recall one of the lecturers who was African/Caribbean/white/British not being treated well. The students going on strike over a race and culture issue and during the placement at the student unit the students actually being asked if they wanted to sit in the same room as black or white workers. We chose to sit in our own room. Social Work brought out the issues that I had been thinking about most of life in a more profound way. There was a great deal to think about and consider which appeared to bring the pieces in my life together.

The first placement at the student unit was in an inner city area team which was very multiracial and I really enjoyed this. Nottingham had a sizeable Pakistani population so I was able to work with some Pakistani families. I knew then what I enjoyed and what I was skilled in and hence the journey started in social work to my current role with families.

I started as a Guardian ad litem in my early 30s. I joined the Leicester panel for Guardian ad Litem, then Nottingham, Birmingham, Inner and North London and some work for Essex. This was in 1996 and I also started some independent social work. Due to my early struggles and looking young for my age it was not easy when I first started as a Guardian Ad Litem not that I could not do the job, but I just looked so young for my age and most people thought I was a solicitor or a barrister when I went to court. Over time my work was recognised and I felt much supported by the Judges. But I have always found the acrimony of court proceedings difficult especially when it led to further divisions between parents and professionals. The move to independent social work for me has lessened the conflictual, acrimonious situations. Most of my assessments for the last year or so have resulted in me not attending court for a final hearing and my recommendations being accepted which is very satisfying.

In the last 8 years I have been travelling to Pakistan and India and this has made my work more interesting and fascinating as I have been to places that I have never travelled to before and I am continually learning new things and also it has helped me to examine my own origins and roots and I have made new friends and actually learnt where some of the families I worked or assessed in the UK have actually come from so when some families talk about the place they come from I know that they are talking about because I have been there. I can also understand my parents more because I have been and seen where they come from. This has helped me to understand myself more.

In terms of the case I would like to discuss. I have found all the cases I have undertaken recently fascinating. One of the things that I try and do is to empower families to help themselves. But the cases that have really been

thought provoking have been assessment of Pakistani fathers. I think this is because it has made me think of my own father. One assessment was of a father of Pakistani origin who had come from a very middle class Pakistani family from Lahore. He was a graphic designer who basically went crazy in England. He was supposed to study, but instead became involved with an African Caribbean woman with long standing mental health difficulties. She converted to Islam for him and they got married. The stage that I became involved was when consideration was being given to placing their first child a boy in Pakistan with his Grandparents. I had to assess the grandparents and the father in Pakistan. By this stage the father had returned to Lahore. I had to explore with him his relationship with the African Caribbean mother which was a cause of shame as his parents did not approve. I had to also explore how a dual heritage child would be accepted in Pakistan. This case made me think about some of my experiences of living in a community where we considered outsiders and different. Other cases that have made me think have been cases of Pakistani women with mental health problems. This probably relates to my experiences of growing up in a predominately white environment and not being understood. I have had a number of cases of Pakistani women who unlike me did not make it and did not survive these earlier difficult experiences and it has made me think why my situation was different. I was lucky enough to have other adults other than my parents who also loved me and I was good at my studies which carried me through, but it has made me think how easily I may not have made it. This feeling is there when I am undertaking assessments my curiosity and empathy for some of the vulnerable adults and children and a desire to work with them in a creative, safe and empowering way. I could have easily not made

it if it was not for some loving and creative, caring people in my life. I realise and acknowledge that some of the most important people in my life were white/British middle class people who were kind and generous with their time and efforts. Having the right people around at the right time can make all the difference. My experiences have made me think about myself and my part in things and to work on my blind spots that may be a barrier in missing things with the vulnerable people that I work with. I also think that diversities of communities' culture and religion is very important. This is why I enjoy living in London so much and I am glad the area in which I live has had an influx of people from other parts of the world. Learning and living with different communities is fascinating and very important. After all this is how my own parents were accepted into the UK. I have never forgotten this.”

University of East London- Consent to participate in a Doctoral research project

Examining the conscious and unconscious meanings in social work assessments for the expert social worker, the Commissioner and parent.

I have read the information leaflet relating to the above programme of research in which I have been asked to participate and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me. I understand that my involvement in this study and particular data from this research will remain strictly confidential. The only exception to this is any imminent harm to an adolescent or child during the course of this study in which case confidentiality may have to be broken.

Due to the small sample group that is being used there are some barriers too full anonymisation but as far as possible pseudo-anonymisation will be implemented as far as is possible.

Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to the data. It has been explained to me what will happen to the data once the research has been completed. I hereby fully and freely consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me.

Having given this consent, I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the programme at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.

Participants name (Block Capitals)

Participant's signature

Researcher's name

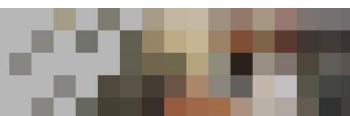
Researcher's signature

Date

Appendix 3



THE GRADUATE SCHOOL



APPLICATION TO REGISTER FOR A RESEARCH DEGREE PROGRAMME

(TO BE COMPLETED BY THE PROPOSED SUPERVISORY TEAM AND THE STUDENT)

In completing this form you should refer to the relevant sections of the Research Degree Regulations (Part 9 of the UEL Manual of General Regulations) and the UEL Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Programmes.

This form should be typewritten wherever possible.

Confirmation of registration will be sent to the student's and the Director of Studies' UEL email address.

When fully completed, this form must be submitted to the nominated individual in the School - usually the Research Administrator or Officer to the SRDSC, accompanied by Form SDN for each supervisor nominated.

1. STUDENT'S DETAILS

FULL NAME	Rukhsana Farooqi Thakrar			
UEL STUDENT NUMBER	0741276			
PROGRAMME FOR WHICH YOU ARE CURRENTLY ENROLLED <i>(Please Tick)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TITLE OF PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE PROGRAMME (IF APPLICABLE) D60				
D60 PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE IN SOCIAL WORK				
DATE OF FIRST ENROLMENT FOR CURRENT PROGRAMME				

CURRENT MODE OF STUDY (Please Tick)	FULL TIME		PART TIME	X
NUMBER OF MODULES CURRENTLY REGISTERED FOR (For Professional				
<i>Doctorates only)</i>				
REQUESTED DATE FOR START OF REGISTRATION (For MPhil/PhD only. Registration must occur within 6/12 months of the date of enrolment for FT/PT students respectively and may be backdated to that date)				
DECLARATION OF PREVIOUS REGISTRATION. For MPhil/PhD only, if you have a previous period of registration elsewhere which you wish to transfer and to form part of your registration at UEL, please give the dates and location of this registration. Proof of this period of registration must be provided.	Not applicable			
SCHOOL				
1) NAME OF COLLABORATING ESTABLISHMENTS (IF ANY) 2) PLEASE LIST YOUR UNDERGRADUATE AND/OR POSTGRADUATE QUALIFICATIONS	LLB (HONS), MA in Social Work, MSC in Mental Health Work Children and Adults. Advanced Award in Social Work. Institute of Psychiatry/Kings College London. Diploma in Humanistic Person centred Counselling Roehampton Institute. Accredited social work Practice Assessor.			
IF YOU ARE CONDUCTING YOUR RESEARCH OUTSIDE THE UK, PLEASE PROVIDE BRIEF DETAILS OF WHERE AND HOW YOU WILL BE SUPPORTED IN YOUR RESEARCH.				

NOT APPLICABLE
DETAILS OF FACILITIES AVAILABLE FOR THE INVESTIGATION, INCLUDING FUNDING AND LOCATION
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK TO BE UNDERTAKEN IN THE COLLABORATING ESTABLISHMENT AND THAT TO BE UNDERTAKEN AT THE SPONSORING ESTABLISHMENT OR ELSEWHERE (IF RELEVANT)

2. THE PROGRAMME OF RESEARCH

PROPOSED TITLE OF THESIS
Race and culture in social work assessments, the conscious and unconscious meanings of these concepts for the expert social worker, the Commissioner and parent.
AIM OF THE INVESTIGATION
THE AIM OF THIS RESEARCH IS TO EXAMINE THE UNCONSCIOUS AND CONSCIOUS PROCESSES AND TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS GOING ON UNDERNEATH THE SURFACE FOR THE EXPERT SOCIAL WORKER, THE COMMISSIONER OF THE ASSESSMENT AND THE PARENT WHO IS BEING ASSESSED.

Lay mans terms

Social Work assessments involving race and culture appear to be very complex; so complex that expert social workers are sometimes asked to undertake the assessment. This study wishes to examine what goes on in the mind of the expert social worker, the commissioner of the assessment (social work manager) and the parent and how these areas impact on them emotionally. The research aims to pull together the thinking from the social worker, the commissioner and parent and to try and draw up themes to help to make sense of the whole process. This will hopefully assist practitioners to think about this complex area.

PROPOSED PLAN OF WORK, INCLUDING ITS RELATIONSHIP TO PREVIOUS WORK, MAXIMUM 4,000 WORDS FOR MPhil/PhD STUDENTS, MAXIMUM 2,000 WORDS FOR PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE STUDENTS. *Please include in your discussion a description of the research methodologies and explain why these methodologies are the most appropriate for the task. Include a list of references for all works cited. Gantt charts may be used.*

Background

The driving force behind this research comes from my personal interest in trying to understand how in some social work assessments notions of race and culture appear to play a major role. There is also a question about the role of racism, institutional and individual racism and how these factors are “acted out in the assessments.” In my current work as an Expert witness I am commissioned often by Local Authorities or the courts to undertake social work assessments in cases where there are issues of culture, race and religion. I have to assist the Local Authority and courts to unravel these issues and also work with the parents in assisting them to explain their narratives.

The aim of this research is to try examine what is at the heart of these processes and the inter-relationship between the three groups (commissioner, expert social worker and parent), as well as in each other’s ‘thinking’. My hypothesis is that there are a number of factors at play, the commissioners of the service may have some anxiety about being called racist. There may be actual confusions over the meaning of culture. There may an element of trying to outsource anxieties and confusions to the expert. There will be the biographical motives of the expert and the parent’s uncertainties about handling ‘culture’ as it appears in the thinking and behaviour of

professionals. It appears a very complex area and it appears that racism plays in some cases a subtle and other cases not so subtle part in some of the decisions or reluctance to accept decisions/recommendations. There also seems to me to be anxiety which is outsourced or projected onto the expert to solve. The whole notion of the role of anxiety will need also to be examined as each player has their own set of anxieties which are “acted out” in some capacity.

I currently undertake a great deal of work in Pakistan and India and I am continually having to deal with anxieties about Pakistan and India and placing children there. A recent example was an assessment of a small community called the Hamady community who live in Qadian in North India. They are exiles from Pakistan as they are considered non- Muslims but afforded special privilege by the Indian Government. A large proportion of this community held influential positions in the Bhutto Government. I was very impressed with the parenting skills of the grandparents involved living in Qadian and I completed a very positive assessment.

The Local Authority initially appeared very resistant but the Court ordered that the Grandfather be assessed in England. The Local Authority despite assessing the grandfather positively in this country and placing him through the most detailed assessment that was well over what is normally expected of a white grandparent (in my opinion and experience of this work) living in London. He passed each aspect of the assessment with flying colours but one further hurdle was put into place requesting a social worker trained in India who had no understanding at all of this community. The assessment was very negative and punitive. I was asked again to provide a further report and these identified serious gaps in the assessment commissioned by the Indian social worker. This which would have led to a serious injustice to the family and child in question. I wondered if the unconscious belief of the LA was that the child was going to be sent to a “slum dog millionaire” situation, or similar, in India. This has led me to wonder why the assessments are commissioned

in the first place and was it a foregone conclusion in the minds of the commissioners that the assessment would be negative; but what then happens when the assessment is positive? In some cases, I have found other experts have been called in to try and counter an assessment that the Local Authority social work team in particular are not happy with.

The research aims to investigate the phenomenon from three interlocking points of view - commissioners/experts/parents. I would like to disentangle at least some strands of the complex 'knot' that these cases seem to represent. The research questions are as follows:

- What are the covert and overt reasons that motivate Local Authority Managers to request an assessment from an expert social worker from a specific cultural and racial background?

- To examine the unconscious and conscious processes going on for

these

Managers.

- To explore with expert social workers, the covert and overt reasons that motivates them to undertake such assessments.
- To examine the unconscious and conscious processes going on for the expert social work practitioner. The aim of this would be to help the social worker explore the unsaid and also explore biography and personal associations and links with the case material.
- To explore the impact of the assessment on the parent(s) including the parent's covert and overt reason for requesting the assessment.

- To explore the parent's experience of racism and how this has been managed by the assessment.
- To explore the conscious and unconscious expectations of the social worker and the organisation that has requested the assessment.
- To explore what type of thinking is operating (for example is it professional thinking, cultural/racial thinking, the unconscious, biographical or psychosocial sources of their thinking or might it be aspects of all these).

The research in this broad area is complex and diverse. There is research on the meaning of race and culture which indicates that this area is highly complex. (Gill Tuckwell 2002). Fanon discussed the collective internalised effects of oppression on black groups and white groups. He suggested that black people who had been colonized begin to identify with the subordinate position consigned to them by white people and to develop an inferiority complex. (1967:154). Farhad Dalal (2002: 227) argues that the theory of racism is an integration of insights from three domains - the cognitive, the emotional and the sociological. Racism is a complex psycho-social phenomenon that is driven by the pragmatics of the power relations in the world.

Fakhry Davids' work on racism adds to the complexity of the meaning of racism He argues in his paper Internal Racism: A psychodynamic perspective on working with cultural difference (1998) that racism is a complex phenomenon. His work shifts the debate from whether to how we are racist. Kareem Jafar (2000) recognised that racism is another important dimension to intercultural therapy. When we are treating patients from black and ethnic minority groups we have to take up issues of their real life experience of racism. He argues that talking about racism is frightening. What are the ingredients of racism? Basic infantile feelings of envy, hate, jealousy, greed,

competitiveness, anger, violence, suspicion, fear, ignorance and conditioning- all pieces of 'shit' that we all have inside us. In an effort to fight racism we fight each other. Racism goes underground and survives. .

In social work assessments they appear to be the following themes

The overrepresentation of Ethnic minority families in child protection cases and in the serious child abuse inquiries. (Gibbons et al; 1995; Barn et al; 1997). The more serious child abuse inquiries in the UK have involved children of ethnic minority origin (Jasmine Beckford Inquiry Report, 1985; Tyra Henry Inquiry Report, 1987; Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report 2003). African/Caribbean and mixed parentage children are over-represented and Asians are under- represented.

undertaking assessments with ethnic minority children

Families are either frequently pathologized and stereotyped, with workers overrelying on cultural explanations for their problems and utilizing a model of cultural deficit (Ahmed, 1994; Thanki, 1994). This may result in speedier and more punitive services rather than preventative/care services (inter alia Barn, 1990; Creighton, 1992) and getting caught up in what Dominelli calls the “hands on/hands off” dilemma (Dominelli, 1998a).

Colour blind approach There has been a colour blind approach when the practitioner assumes all cultures are equally valid and is guided by the principle that one culture has no right to pass judgement on the practices of another social work practitioners do not notice the importance of ethnicity. (Dominelli, 1988; Thanki, 1994; Boushol, 2000; Graham; 2002). This can have disastrous consequences as witnessed in the Victoria Climbié case (Lord Laming, 2003).

Anti-racist and black perspectives as opposed to cultural awareness approaches.

Many black people and practitioners believe as Dominelli (1988) argues that white social workers should not work with black or ethnic minorities families until they have demonstrated their ability to practice anti-racist social work.

(Barn, Sinclair and Ferdinand (1997) examined the impact of the Children Act 1989; although the Children Act makes clear that the concept of ethnicity is wider than racial origin - including also religion, language and culture. The study acknowledged the importance of taking account of 'race, culture, religion and language' in undertaking the analysis of need that underpins Children's Services Planning. In working practically with black and ethnic minority families. In the use of family group conferences.

Ruth O'Shaughnessy, Catherine Collins and L Fatimilehi's (2009) research found the

use of Family Group Conferences for Black and Ethnic minority (BME) children and their families to be useful. It was essential that the Coordinators were able to work cross-culturally to a high level and to reflect on their own cultural context and history. They also had to have an understanding of racism and discrimination and how these operated on an individual and institutional level.

There have been some frameworks that have been developed to assist practitioners working with ethnic minority communities

Sheila Furness and Philip Gilligan (2010) felt that there was a need to develop a framework for practice. They examined the need for a framework that will assist social workers to identify when religion and belief are significant in the lives and circumstances of service users and how to take sufficient account of these issues in specific pieces of practice. The authors argue that despite an explosion of interest in issues relating to religion, belief, spirituality and social work during the past five years, research consistently suggests that most social workers and related professionals experience considerable difficulties in identifying and responding appropriately to the religious and spiritual needs of service users(Furness, 2003; Gilligan, 2003, 2009, Furman et al; 2004; Gilligan and Furness, 2006; Crisp, 2008; Gray 2008; Stirling et al; 2009). Dutt and Phillips (2000, p.48) stated that the emphasis should be on the importance of assessing group identification, individual and personal identity, cultural and religious and linguistic identity, the acquisition of cultural identity and religion within the domains of children's developmental Needs

Research method

The research method which I have chosen to help unravel these complexities

centres on the free association narrative and interview method as devised by Wendy Holloway and Tony Jefferson. (2000). It is known as FANI for short. This is a particular form of interviewing. It allows one to consider the importance of unconscious dynamics in the research interview and to think about the defences against anxiety. This is very important for my research as the area of race and racism is very anxiety provoking. This method also takes account and recognises the that the interviewer will also have their own fears and anxieties and the interviewer needs to be aware of these anxieties. This again is very important as I have my own ideas and experiences which I have to think about. These are I have been subjected to racism so I have my own personal experiences of racism. I undertake specialist assessments so I have my own experiences to think about and put to one side if I can. I am aware this will take some disciplined thinking. Both I and the person (commissioner (Local Authority), social worker and parent I am interviewing will be subject to projections and introjections of ideas and feelings coming from the other person. The impressions that we have about each other are not derived simply from 'real' relationships but also what we say and what we do in the interaction. This will be mediated by the internal fantasies which come from the histories of significant relationships. Such histories are often accessible only through our feelings not our conscious awareness. The feelings in and around the interview are of value for understanding dynamics of the research relationship. I need to be aware of my own feelings that are brought up in the interview. These will come up when I am analysing the interview material, but also in the course of doing interviews.

Walkerdine (1997) states it is important that researchers are aware of the feelings that are brought up in the interview (subsequently when analysing it). Transference and counter transference are important in the production of subtle and unconscious

dynamics. I will be considering transference and counter transference very carefully. The following unpublished paper by Heather Price and Andrew Cooper entitled in the field: Psychoanalytic observation and epistemological realism is useful in thinking about how the researcher can become entangled in transference and counter transference dynamics and enactments. The researcher and the researched influence each other. To assist me in recording my transference and counter transference responses I have drawn on research by, Steiner (1980). Steiner states that there is frustration and anxiety associated with any unconscious experience, or where frustration and anxiety occurs this is communicated in two different ways. In one mode, this is symbolised and communicated in words or narrative. In another mode, it is projected in the form of actions or feelings. In the analytic situation, the analyst experiences a counter-transference pressure to act, an emotional nudge, or pressure or invasion; the two modes of communication are related to a single experience or psychic process and the job of interpretation is about linking them up – linking symbols to un-symbolised elements. Steiner likens this to the process of decoding a dream in analysis. In helping me interpret and record the data I will write down and describe my counter transference responses and I will make use of individual discussion and the group research supervision to help me link my own narrative as a researcher at a verbal or 'neurotic' level) and the *felt* experience of ingestion of toxic substance and ensuing illness ('psychotic' or non-verbal level) that generates an interpretation of the data.

Research Participants 3 social work experts who regularly undertake specialist

assessments where race and culture is a feature of the case will be interviewed using the FANI method. Alongside this I will interview 3 commissioners of the service and 3 parents who have been subject to an assessment. In order to gather a sample, the researcher will approach the National Association of Guardians ad litem and Reporting officers for specialist social workers who have undertaken specialist assessments involving race and culture. The commissioners of the assessments will either be from cases that these social workers have been involved with or the researcher will approach a number of Local Authorities and other commissioners of service such as the voluntary sector or the Judiciary who regularly commission such assessments. The parents will be recruited from the specialist social workers' caseload or from the Local Authorities/ voluntary sector/courts that have been approached.

Data collection and analysis.

There will be two interviews which will be taped at the consent of the interviewee.

The first interview will be to establish a preliminary reading to understand what is being said. This will be a more narrative interview. Although I will be closely examining the contradictions, inconsistencies, avoidances and changes of emotional tone of the material in the interview Holloway and Jefferson (1997). I will also be looking at links based on spontaneous association rather than consistency found in the told narrative. I will listen and not intervene until I have identified the themes and return to the themes in the way that they have been ordered to elicit further information. In the second interview I will check out my emergent hunches and provisional hypotheses. The aim would be to conduct the second interview as

quickly as possible after the first interview. The starting point would be the material

generated from the first interview. In between the interviews I will listen to the tapes to get the insider and outsider perspective of the interview. My notes from the first interview will assist me to construct a series of tailor made narrative questions for the second interview. These questions will be structured and the aim would be to try and elicit material not covered in the first interview. It is important to understand the whole text." Parts are defined by their relationship to the system as a whole in which they are functioning" (Murphy and Kovach, 1972:258). As well as using the transcripts from both interviews, there are the memories of the meetings with the person, the notes taken from the first meeting and subsequent interviews. I will be using a pro-forma consisting of categories ranging from standard data to comments on themes and ideas that emerged from the whole reading. During the reading of all the raw data, notes will be taken and extracts highlighted. The pro forma is completed using the notes. The difference between the notes (which were kept in each person's file) and the pro forma is that the notes were a way of amassing descriptive detail, while the summary is used to begin to convey some kind of whole. I will gather narrative summaries and look at case studies. The aim would be to consider the relationship between the different cases and the 3 main perspectives (commissioner, expert and parent) to

develop an analysis of the whole picture. I will need to make a link between the unconnected elements in the data. There will be missing links and I will move from a single link to multiple links. The aim is to trace a series of links, each one informed by the wider significance of the interview. The links should be characterised by both social and psychological explanations in this way fulfilling claim to represent psychosocial subjects. I will also be identifying themes that emerge from the data.

The aim would be to find repeated patterns of meaning in the data using thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). I need to be very mindful of researcher reflexivity', to help process the complex boundary between myself (considering my professional, biographical, ethnic and 'unconscious' positioning) and the research data. Price and Cooper state on page 9 of their paper that the researcher will be exposed to primitive and unprocessed psychic 'material' this will result in them identifying with the research objects and the primitive defences belonging to the researcher. In order to counter balance this, they will need the help of others, not so emotionally identified with the material, to rediscover reflective thinking capacity in relation to the unprocessed, unconscious aspects of the material, and to link together their registration of conscious and unconscious data. The role of individual, and group, psychoanalytic research supervision is very important to help untangle the unconscious processes and communication from the field of experience being researched.

Ethics

Each participant will be given an information letter which will include full details of the study, including relevant contact details of the research supervisors and researchers. It will also explain how participants may withdraw at any stage of the process. It is understood that the research interviews may generate some distress on the parent, the social worker and the commissioner. The parent will be referred to the allocated social worker and commissioner if they become overtly distressed and the consent forms which all participants have to complete will state very clearly that participants taking part in the interviews can withdraw at any stage of the process. I will ensure data protection by using encrypted sticks. All notes will be anonymised. The central ethical principles of honesty, sympathy and respect are central to this research. As the data may be coming from different Local Authorities the relevant Local Authority will need to be satisfied with the ethical framework and this may mean that I will need to get ethical approval from the relevant Local Authority ethics committee. I need to be very mindful of confidentiality and this will be made very clear in the information letter and consent form. A letter will be sent to the specialist social workers, social work teams and the parents inviting them to participate in the study. Individuals interested in participating will be sent a consent form to be returned to the researcher in order to facilitate the establishment of direct contact. I will then contact the participant to arrange a mutually convenient time to carry out the interview. The information letter will include the full details of the study, including relevant contact details of the research supervisors and researcher. It also explains how participants may withdraw at any stage of the process. The interviews will be transcribed and anonymised during the transcription process and a copy will be sent to the interviewee for confirmation of accuracy

The interviews will take place either in the participants' offices or homes depending

on what is convenient for the participant. All interviews will be recorded using a digital recorder and interviews will be transcribed. Once an appropriate sample is identified. A letter will be sent to the specialist social workers, social work teams and the parents inviting them to participate in the study. Individuals interested in participating will be sent a consent form to be returned to the researcher in order to facilitate the establishment of direct contact. The interviews will be transcribed and anonymised during the transcription process and a copy will be sent to the interviewee for confirmation of accuracy.

Research Plan

I would aim to undertake pilot interviews and data collection after obtaining ethical approval from March 2012 to September 2012. From September to March 2013 I will be involved in data analysis and writing up the research.

Resources required and arrangements for securing them

Transcripts will be kept in a locked filing cabinet for the duration of the research and shredded on completion of the project.

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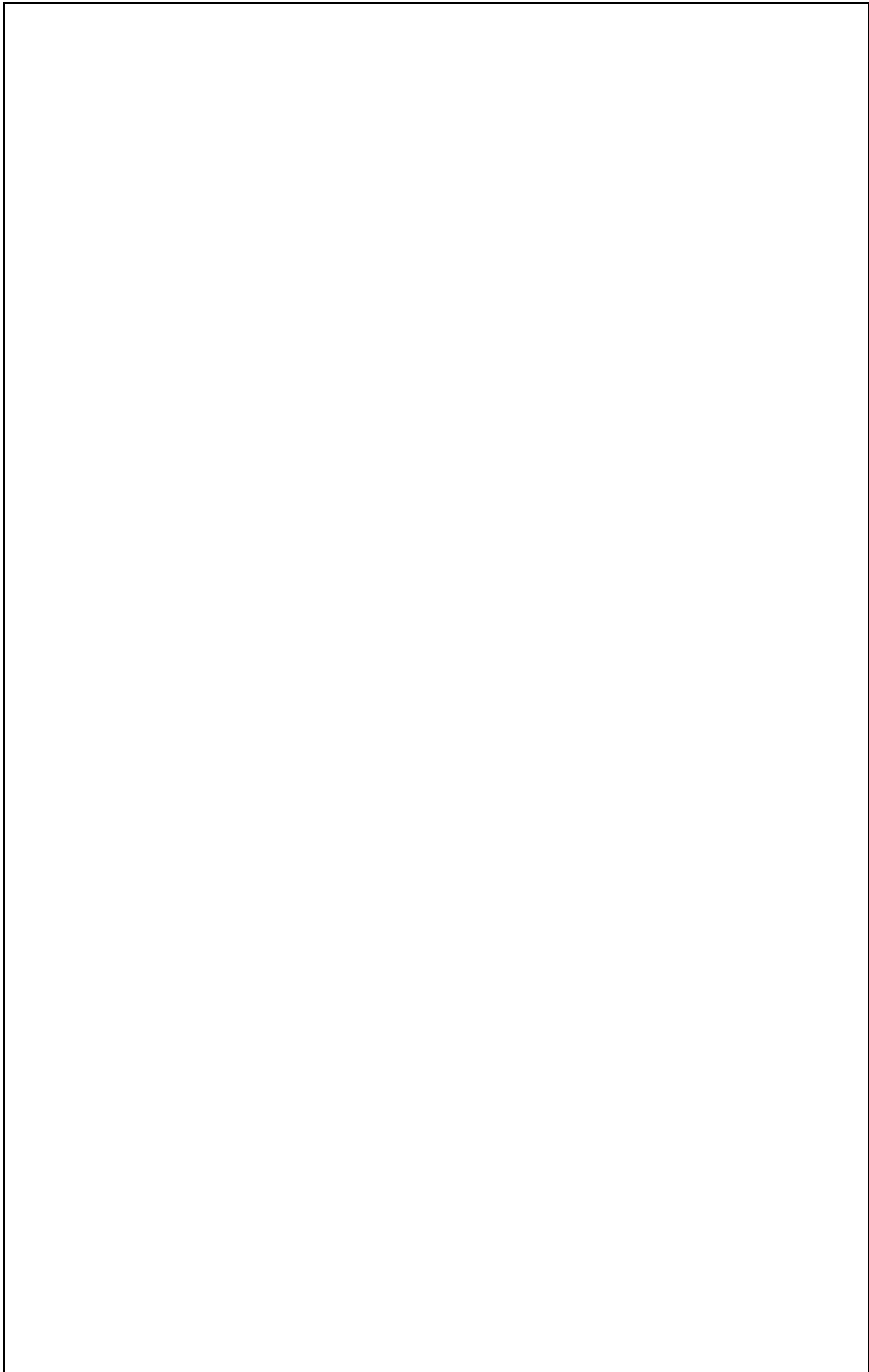
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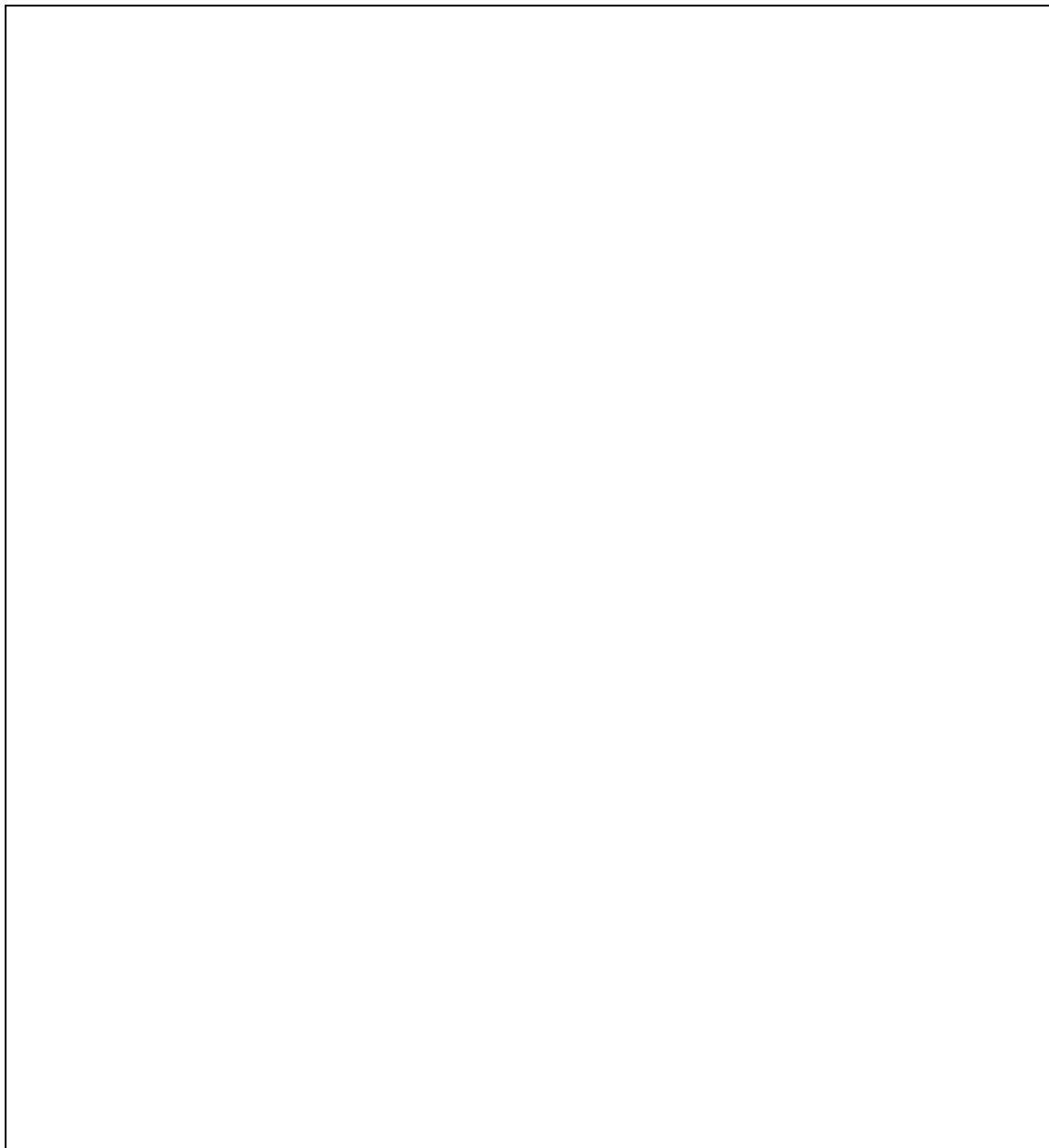
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**SUMMARY OF THE ELEMENTS OF THE INVESTIGATION THAT
ARE NOVEL, ORIGINAL OR CREATIVE AND THAT MAY
CONSTITUTE PRODUCTION OF ORIGINAL KNOWLEDGE OR AN
ORIGINAL INTERPRETATION OF EXISTING KNOWLEDGE**

THERE APPEARS TO BE NO RESEARCH WHICH EXPLORES THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL COMPLEXITIES AND BIOGRAPHICAL MOTIVES FOR WHY PRACTITIONERS ARE DRAWN TOWARDS SPECIALIST ASSESSMENTS INVOLVING THE COMPLEX AREA OF RACE AND CULTURE AND THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF THIS TYPE OF ASSESSMENT ON THE PRACTITIONER, PARENT, AND THE ORGANISATION COMMISSIONING THIS TYPE OF WORK. I WILL ALSO BE EXPLORING THE UNFORSEEN CONSEQUENCES OF

THESE ASSESSMENTS ON THE ORGANISATION.

A HEALTH AND SAFETY RISK ASSESSMENT IS REQUIRED IN RESPECT OF ALL PROPOSED LABORATORY EXPERIMENTS AND/OR FIELDWORK.

DOES THIS INVESTIGATION REQUIRE LABORATORY EXPERIMENTS AND/OR FIELDWORK? <i>(Please Tick)</i>	YES			
IF YES, A MANDATORY COPY OF THE RISK ASSESSMENT, SIGNED BY THE STUDENT AND THE DIRECTOR OF STUDIES, IS ATTACHED <i>(Please</i>			No	

<i>Tick)</i>				
DOES THE PROGRAMME OF RESEARCH INVOLVE WORK THAT WOULD REQUIRE THE APPROVAL OF THE UNIVERSITY'S ETHICS COMMITTEE PRIOR TO THAT PART OF THE PROJECT	YES			
COMMENCING? <i>(Please Tick)</i>				

<p>IF YES, HAS A FORM FOR APPROVAL ALREADY BEEN MADE TO THE UNIVERSITY'S ETHICS COMMITTEE? <i>(Please Tick)</i> <i>You may not proceed with this part of your research until approval has been granted.</i></p>	<p>IN THE PROCESS OF APPLYING FOR THIS</p>			
<p>WILL THE PROGRAMME OF RESEARCH LEAD TO OUTPUT(S) WHICH WILL HAVE COMMERCIAL FORM(S) AND/OR INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY OF POTENTIAL VALUE? <i>If yes, you must inform the Knowledge Transfer Office</i></p>			<p>No</p>	

3. PROPOSED SUPERVISORY TEAM

Form SDN - Nomination as a Supervisor/Director of Studies should be appended for the Director of Studies and each supervisor nominated. The SRDSC will use information supplied about current

and past supervisions to ensure that this proposal does not breach the maximum number of PGR students that can be supervised without consent.

NOMINATION OF DIRECTOR OF STUDIES				
NAME AND TITLE	Professor Andrew Cooper			
SCHOOL	Tavistock			
EMAIL ADDRESS (preferably an institutional or official email address)	acooper@tavi-port.nhs.uk			
HOLDS A PHD/PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE? (Please Tick)	YES		No	X

NOMINATION OF SECOND SUPERVISOR	
NAME AND TITLE	
SCHOOL (and for supervisors external to UEL, their institution and full postal address)	
EMAIL ADDRESS (preferably an institutional or official email address)	

HOLDS A PHD/PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE? <i>(Please Tick)</i>	YES		No	
NOMINATION OF THIRD SUPERVISOR (IF APPLICABLE)				
NAME AND TITLE				
SCHOOL <i>(and for supervisors external to UEL, their institution and full postal address)</i>				
EMAIL ADDRESS <i>(preferably an institutional or official email address)</i>				
HOLDS A PHD/PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE? <i>(Please Tick)</i>	YES		No	

OVERALL SUPERVISORY EXPERIENCE AND ACTIVITY OF THE PROPOSED SUPERVISORY TEAM				
NUMBER OF RESEARCH DEGREE STUDENTS CURRENTLY SUPERVISED <i>(excluding this one)</i>	MPhil		PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE	
	PhD <i>including PhD (Eur)</i>			
NUMBER OF RESEARCH	MPhil		PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE	

DEGREE STUDENTS PREVIOUSLY SUCCESSFULLY SUPERVISED TO COMPLETION FOR	PHD <i>including PhD (Eur)</i>				
<p>IF THE COMBINED EXPERIENCE AND ACTIVITY OF THE PROPOSED SUPERVISORY TEAM DOES NOT MEET THE REQUIREMENTS STIPULATED IN UEL'S RESEARCH DEGREE REGULATIONS, PLEASE PROVIDE A SHORT STATEMENT JUSTIFYING WHY CONSENT IS SOUGHT AND WHY THIS PARTICULAR SUPERVISORY TEAM IS MOST SUITABLE FOR THE PROGRAMME OF RESEARCH.</p>					

4. NOMINATION OF ADVISORS

NOMINATION OF FIRST ADVISOR, IF APPLICABLE	
NAME AND TITLE	
CURRENT POSITION, DEPARTMENT AND INSTITUTION	
FULL POSTAL ADDRESS	
EMAIL ADDRESS <i>(preferably an institutional or official email address)</i>	
PREVIOUS POSTS HELD	
QUALIFICATIONS	
NOMINATION OF SECOND ADVISOR, IF APPLICABLE	
NAME AND TITLE	
CURRENT POSITION, DEPARTMENT AND INSTITUTION	
FULL POSTAL ADDRESS	

EMAIL ADDRESS <i>(preferably an institutional or official email address)</i>	
PREVIOUS POSTS HELD	
QUALIFICATIONS	

5. STUDENT'S DECLARATION

PLEASE NOTE THAT ELECTRONIC SIGNATURES ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE

I CONFIRM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • THAT I WISH TO APPLY TO BE REGISTERED AS A STUDENT FOR THE POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH AWARD INDICATED AT THE HEAD OF THIS FORM. • THAT THE PARTICULARS GIVEN IN THIS FORM ARE CORRECT. • THAT EXCEPT WITH THE SPECIFIC PERMISSION OF THE RESEARCH DEGREES SUBCOMMITTEE, ANY WRITTEN COMPONENT OF THE PROGRAMME MUST BE SUBMITTED IN ENGLISH AND I MUST ALSO UNDERTAKE AN ORAL EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH. • ELECTRONIC SIGNATURES ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE 	
STUDENT	SIGNED: <i>RUKHSANA FAROOQI THAKRAR</i> COMPUTER SIGNATURE)

	DATE: 13 FEBRUARY 2011.
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6. SUPERVISORY TEAM'S DECLARATION

PLEASE NOTE THAT ELECTRONIC SIGNATURES ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE

WE CONFIRM		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • THAT WE SUPPORT THIS FORM AND BELIEVE THAT THE STUDENT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO COMPLETE THE PROGRAMME OF WORK PROPOSED • THAT, AS REQUIRED BY OUR UNIVERSITY'S RESEARCH DEGREE REGULATIONS, WE ARE NOT OURSELVES CURRENTLY RECEIVING SUPERVISION ON A RESEARCH DEGREE PROGRAMME AT ANY HEI 		
<input type="checkbox"/> THAT, IF APPLICABLE, WE AGREE TO THE REQUEST FOR THE BACKDATING OF REGISTRATION		
WE RECOMMEND THAT THE APPLICANT BE REGISTERED FOR A RESEARCH DEGREE		
DIRECTOR OF STUDIES	SIGNED:	
	PRINTED:	DATE:
SECOND SUPERVISOR	SIGNED:	
	PRINTED:	DATE:
THIRD SUPERVISOR (IF APPLICABLE)	SIGNED:	
	PRINTED:	DATE:

8. DEAN OF SCHOOL'S DECLARATION

PLEASE NOTE THAT ELECTRONIC SIGNATURES ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE

I CONFIRM THAT THE UNIVERSITY AND SCHOOL FACILITIES AND RESOURCES DETAILED IN THIS FORM, TOGETHER WITH OTHER APPROPRIATE RESOURCES, SUCH AS SUPERVISOR(S)' TIME, WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR THE DURATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF RESEARCH		
DEAN OF SCHOOL <i>(or nominee)</i>	SIGNED:	
	PRINTED:	DATE:

9. DOCUMENT LOG

ONCE SECTIONS 1-8 HAVE BEEN COMPLETED, THIS FORM, ALONG WITH FORM(S) SDN, SHOULD BE SUBMITTED TO THE RELEVANT SCHOOL SRDSC FOR CONSIDERATION AND THE REFERENCE FOR THE PERTINENT MINUTE(S) RECORDED BELOW. IF RECOMMENDED, THE FORM AND FORM(S) SHOULD THEN BE SENT TO THE RESEARCH DEGREES SUBCOMMITTEE FOR APPROVAL ALONG WITH THE RELEVANT EXTRACT FROM THE MINUTES (EITHER ATTACHED TO THIS FORM OR PASTED AT ITS END). PLEASE NOTE THAT THE FORM WILL NOT BE PROCESSED UNTIL THE GRADUATE SCHOOL HAS RECEIVED THE MINUTES OF BOTH COMMITTEES IN THEIR ENTIRETY.

RECOMMENDED BY SCHOOL SRDSC	DATE OF SRDSC:
	MINUTE REF:
APPROVED BY RESEARCH DEGREES SUBCOMMITTEE	DATE OF RESEARCH DEGREES SUBCOMMITTEE:
	MINUTE REF:

21 September 2012

Dear Rukhsana,

Project Title:	Race and Culture in Social Work Assessments, the Conscious and Unconscious Meanings of these Concepts for the Expert Social Worker, the Commissioner and Parent
Researcher(s):	Rukhsana Thakrar
Principal Investigator:	Andrew Cooper

I am writing to confirm that the application for the aforementioned proposed research study has now received ethical approval on behalf of University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), following amendments requested at the meeting on **4 July 2012**.

Should any significant adverse events or considerable changes occur in connection with this research project that may consequently alter relevant ethical considerations, this must be reported immediately to UREC. Subsequent to such changes an Ethical Amendment Form should be completed and submitted to UREC.

Approved Research Site

I am pleased to confirm that the approval of the proposed research applies to the following research site.

Research Site	Principal Investigator / Local Collaborator
UEL Fieldwork	Andrew Cooper

Approved Documents

The final list of documents reviewed and approved by the Committee is as follows:

Document	Version	Date
Participant Information Sheet	1.1	22 August 2012
Consent Form	1.1	22 August 2012

Approval is given on the understanding that the [UEL Code of Good Practice in Research](#) is adhered to.

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of this project.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Merlin Harries'.

Merlin Harries
University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)
Quality Assurance and Enhancement Telephone:
0208-223-2009
Email: researchethics@uel.ac.uk